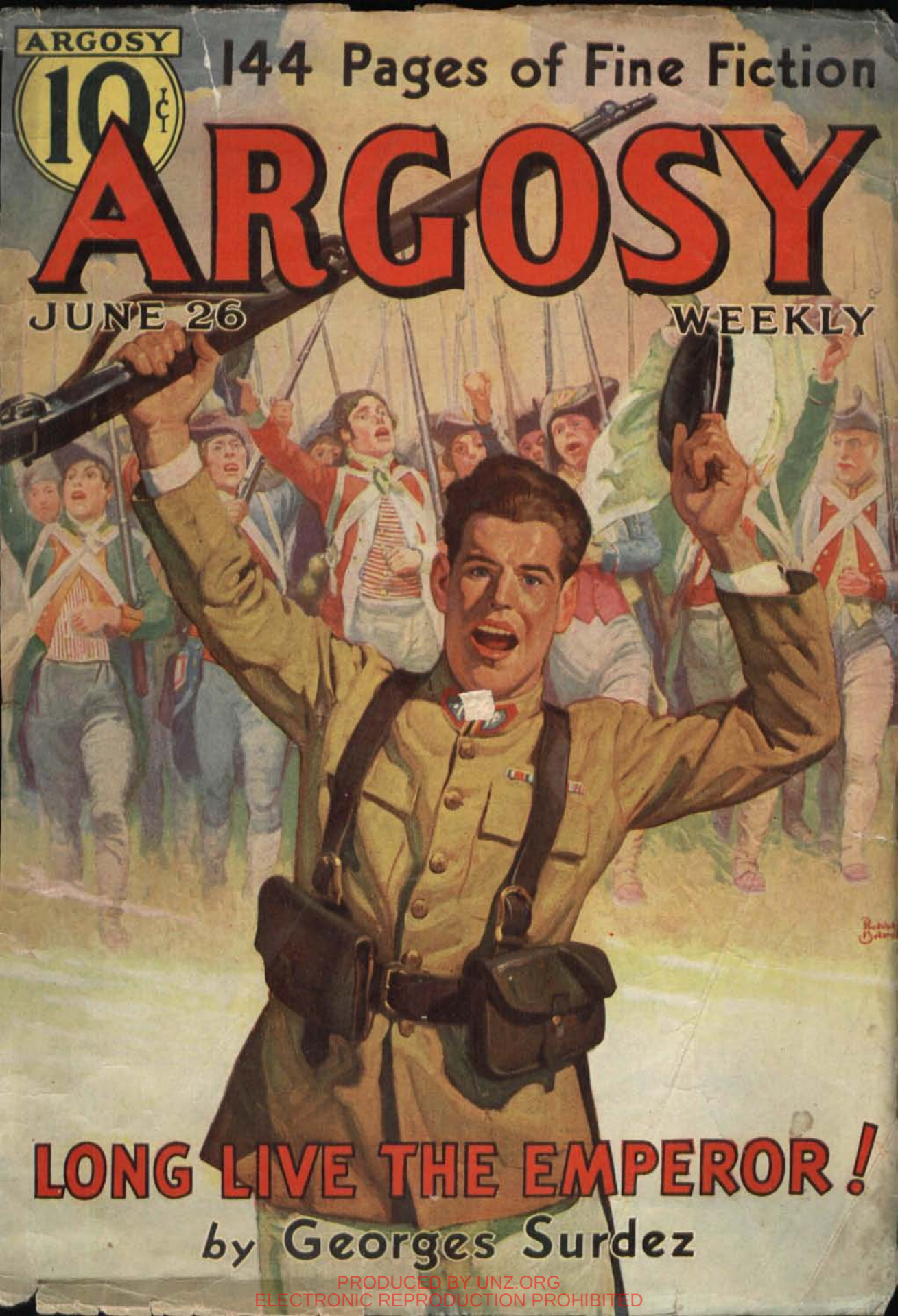


PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Arrest Him, Officer!

I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!

Follow This Man!

SECRET Service Operator No. 38 is on the job... *follow him* through all the excitement of his chase after the counterfeit gang. See how a crafty operator works. Tell-tale finger prints in the murdered girl's room that help him solve the great mystery! BETTER than fiction because every word is TRUE. No obligation. Just mail me the coupon and get—

FREE The Confidential Reports No. 38 Made to His Chief

And the best part of it all is this—it may open your eyes to the great opportunity for YOU as a well paid Finger Print Expert. This is a young, *fast-growing* profession. The kind of work you would like. Excitement! Thrills! Travel! *A regular monthly salary.* Reward money. *And remember:* graduates of this school HEAD 47% of *all* Identification Bureaus in the U. S. Quick! Mail the Coupon NOW and I'll send you these Free Confidential Reports!

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE

1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. A-114 Chicago, Illinois

Institute of Applied Science
1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. A-114 Chicago, Illinois

Gentlemen:—Without any obligation whatsoever, send me the Reports of Operator No. 38, also your illustrated Free Book on Finger Prints and your low prices and Easy Terms Offer. Literature will be sent only to persons stating their age.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ *Age*

Newly Discovered Hormone Helps Men Past 40

It's a hormone used by many doctors here and abroad to strengthen impaired vigor caused by weakened glands. This hormone, together with other beneficial ingredients, is obtained in Zo-ak Tablets (Blue Box for Men—Orange Box for Women) at all good druggists. Try them **uninterruptedly** for **one month.** If you do not feel vastly improved your druggist gives you your money back. Don't accept a cheaper substitute. Zo-ak contains the genuine gland-stimulating hormone. No harmful drugs. Booklet by registered physician free. **Zo-ak Co., 56B W. 45th St., N. Y.**

8 Shot BLANK REVOLVER

DOUBLE ACTION

$4.95

SAFE and HARMLESS

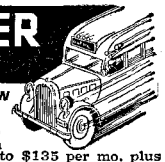
Ball Cartridges cannot be inserted; Shoots 22 blanks only. Construction and finish same as hi-grade firearms. No permit required. For starting races, theatricals, training dogs, etc.
8 Shot Blank Revolvers, double action 22 cal. **$4.95**
8 Shot Blank Revolvers, 22 cal. D. A., pearl stock....**$5.95**
6 Shot Blank Automatic, 22 cal. jiffy ejector.....**$4.45**
100 Blanks FREE with each. Extra Cartridges, per 100 .50
$2 Deposit required on C. O. D.'s
Badges: Private Detective, Sheriff, Special Police, Private Watchman, Constable, etc.—**Nickel .85c Gold Fltd. $1.45**
Bargain Catalog: S&W, Colts, Rifles, Police Goods, Telescopes, Binoculars, Holsters, Belts, etc. Send 3c stamp.
LEE SALES CO. (Dept. MN) 35 W. 32nd St. NEW YORK CITY

LET ME SEND YOU THIS TAILORED SUIT

AND PAY YOU UP TO $10 IN A DAY

Amazing new idea! Wear this splendid suit and I'll pay for it if you'll follow my easy plan and qualify. Choose suit from fine woolens, tailored to your measure. Just show it to your friends. Make up to $10 in a day—easy—representing big nationally-known tailoring house. No experience needed. ACTUAL SAMPLES FREE! Write today for details of sensational new plan and actual Samples. SEND NO MONEY. H. J. Graves, Pres. STONEFIELD CORP., 1300 W. Harrison, Dept. U-705, Chicago.

BE A PASSENGER Traffic Inspector



A Position is Ready for You—Men Needed NOW

Railway and Bus Lines are constantly asking for our trained graduates. Short, home-study course prepares you, and upon completion, we place you at up to $135 per mo. plus expenses to start, or refund tuition. Active Men—19 to 50 eligible. Write for the interesting story of Traffic Inspection. **STANDARD BUSINESS TRAINING INSTITUTE, Dept. 5006, Buffalo, N. Y.**

LIQUOR HABIT

STOPPED BY SCIENTIFIC TREATMENT

Graves Home treatment may be given with or without patient's knowledge. Send today for

FREE TRIAL!

and valuable descriptive booklet. No cost or obligation.
GRAVES LABORATORIES, INC.
53 W. Jackson St. (Dept. MSL) Chicago, Ill.

Old Leg Trouble

Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and injuries or no cost for trial if it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe the cause of your trouble and get a FREE BOOK.

Dr. M. S. Clason Viscose Co.
140 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Free For Asthma

If you suffer with those terrible attacks of Asthma at this season of the year; if you choke and gasp for breath don't fail to send at once for a **free trial** of a remarkable method. No matter where you live nor what your age or occupation nor whether you have any faith in any remedy under the Sun, send for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Write now and test the method free on your own case. Address:
Frontier Asthma Co. 177-B Frontier Bldg.
462 Niagara Street, Buffalo, N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THIS EMPTY MEANS

It takes brain to earn money—trained brain! The man without training is usually the man without cash. You can train your brain! Thousands of men have done it through spare-time study of I. C. S. Courses. Be a cash man—be a trained man—mail this coupon!

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

BOX 2198-F, SCRANTON, PENNA.

★ Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked X: ★

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

☐ Architect	☐ Sheet Metal Worker	☐ Plumbing ☐ Steam Fitting	☐ Bridge Engineer
☐ Architectural Draftsman	☐ Boilermaker	☐ Heating ☐ Ventilation	☐ Bridge and Building Foreman
☐ Building Estimating	☐ Telegraph Engineer	☐ Air Conditioning	☐ Chemistry
☐ Contractor and Builder	☐ Telephone Work ☐ Radio	☐ Steam Engineer	☐ Pharmacy
☐ Structural Draftsman	☐ Mechanical Engineering	☐ Steam Electric Engineer	☐ Coal Mining
☐ Structural Engineer	☐ Mechanical Draftsman	☐ Marine Engineer	☐ Mine Foreman ☐ Fire Bosses
☐ Management of Inventions	☐ Machinist ☐ Toolmaker	☐ R. R. Locomotives	☐ Navigation
☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Patternmaker	☐ R. R. Section Foreman	☐ Cotton Manufacturing
☐ Electric Lighting	☐ Diesel Engines	☐ Air Brakes ☐ R. R. Signalmen	☐ Woolen Manufacturing
☐ Welding, Electric and Gas	☐ Aviation Engines	☐ Highway Engineering	☐ Agriculture
☐ Reading Shop Blueprints	☐ Automobile Mechanic	☐ Civil Engineering	☐ Fruit Growing
☐ Heat Treatment of Metals	☐ Refrigeration	☐ Surveying and Mapping	☐ Poultry Farming

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

☐ Business Management	☐ Bookkeeping	☐ Service Station Salesmanship	☐ Grade School Subjects
☐ Industrial Management	☐ Secretarial Work	☐ First Year College Subjects	☐ High School Subjects
☐ Traffic Management	☐ Spanish	☐ Business Correspondence	☐ College Preparatory
☐ Accountancy	☐ French	☐ Stenography and Typing	☐ Illustrating
☐ Cost Accountant	☐ Salesmanship	☐ Civil Service ☐ Mail Carrier	☐ Cartooning
☐ C. P. Accountant	☐ Advertising	☐ Railway Mail Clerk	☐ Lettering Show Cards ☐ Signs

DOMESTIC SCIENCE COURSES

☐ Home Dressmaking	☐ Advanced Dressmaking	☐ Millinery ☐ Foods and Cookery
☐ Professional Dressmaking and Designing		☐ Tea Room and Cafeteria Management, Catering

Name.....*Age*.....*Address*.....

City.....*State*.....*Present Position*.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARGOSY

Action Stories of Every Variety

Volume 274 CONTENTS FOR JUNE 26, 1937 Number 1

Long Live the Emperor—*Complete Novelet*.....Georges Surdez 4
A twentieth-century Legionnaire joins Napoleon's army

A Strange Place to Be—*Complete Novelet*....Donald Barr Chidsey 22
Grant Kelsing took ship for Noumea—and landed on Trouble Island

The Big Wind Blows—*Second of five parts*.....Eustace L. Adams 46
The storm-lashed Caribbean waters rise higher than man's fury

Venus de Malibu—*Short Story*.....Dale Clark 64
Hollywood's J. Edwin Bell sets a bear trap for Santa Claus

Men of Daring—*True Story in Pictures*.....Stookie Allen 76
Canfield and Gates—Gamboleers

The Smoking Land—*Fifth of six parts*.....George Challis 78
Is there any escape from the realm of ice and fire?

Royal Road—*Short Story*.....Robert Carse 95
Christophe of Haiti had his golden bullet—the Englishman his blade

Señor Vulture—*Conclusion*.....Johnston McCulley 111
The missions fight for life against the black-garbed Don

Men without Dogs—*Short Story*.....C. F. Kearns 132
A dangerous detour on the snow-packed trail to safety

Shock Company.....Harold Ledbetter 75

Puppets for Moppets.....J. Wentworth Tilden 110

Never Say Die.....Albert George 131

Argonotes 142

Looking Ahead!..... 144

This magazine is on sale every Tuesday

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, Publisher, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y.
WILLIAM T. DEWART, President

MESSAGERIES HACHETTE
3, La Belle Sauvage, Ludgate Hill, London, E.C.4

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.
111 Rue Réaumur

Published weekly and copyright, 1937, by The Frank A. Munsey Company. Single copies 10 cents. By the year $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; Canada, $5.00; Other countries, $7.00. Currency should not be sent unless registered. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Entered as second class matter November 28, 1896, at the post office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright and must not be reprinted without the publisher's permission. Title registered in U. S. Patent Office. Copyrighted in Great Britain. Printed in U. S. A.

Manuscripts submitted to this magazine should be accompanied by sufficient postage for their return if found unavailable. The publisher can accept no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LAW STUDY AT HOME

Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. They command respect. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Big corporations are headed by men with legal training.

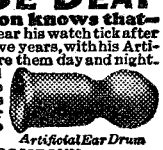
More Ability: More Prestige: More Money

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Successful graduates in every section of the United States. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 64-page "Law Training for Leadership" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 658-L Chicago

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF

—Every deaf person knows that— Mr. Way made himself hear his watch tick after being deaf for twenty-five years, with his Artificial Ear Drums. He wore them day and night. They stopped his head noises. They are invisible and comfortable, no wires or batteries. Write for TRUE STORY. Also booklet on Deafness.

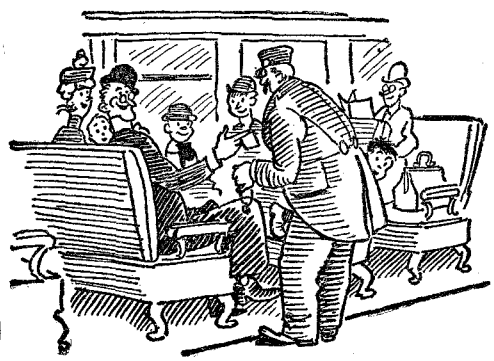


Artificial Ear Drum

THE WAY COMPANY
726 McKerchey Bldg. Detroit, Michigan

LIQUOR HABIT

Send for FREE TRIAL of Noxalco, a guaranteed harmless home treatment. Can be given secretly in food or drink to anyone who drinks or craves Whiskey, Beer, Gin, Home Brew, Wine, Moonshine, etc. Your request for Free Trial brings trial supply by return mail and full $2.00 treatment which you may try under a 30 day refund guarantee. Try Noxalco at our risk. ARLEE CO. Dept. 204 BALTIMORE, MD.



3200 Fans Can't Be Wrong!

Yes, sir, 3200 railroad hobbyists took part in a recent excursion to American Locomotive Works at Schenectady, N. Y. Why? What is this glamor about the roaring road? What is the secret of railroad fan enthusiasm? You'll find the answer in *The Railroad Fan Movement*, which tells the whole story for the first time, in the July issue of

RAILROAD STORIES

Magazine

NOW ON SALE — 15¢ at news-stands, or write to 280 Broadway, New York City

TIRE PRICES SLASHED

GOODYEAR · FIRESTONE
GOODRICH · U·S·

AND OTHER STANDARD BRANDS

29x4.40-21 $1.75

28x4.75-19 $2.05

Biggest Tire Bargains in the World! Get Economy Reconditioned Tires for superior quality. Our Exclusive Scientific methods and expert workmanship insure **greater value**—more wearing miles per dollar. **Thousands of satisfied users everywhere.** We guarantee 12 months service or replace at half price. **Tires shipped unwrapped**—you see what you're getting! Reference: Merchants Bank, Kansas City. **Be Wise—Economize!**

GUARANTEE 12 MONTHS SERVICE or replace at half price.

BALLOON TIRES

Size Rim	Tire	Tube
29x4.40-21	$1.75	$0.83
29x4.50-20	1.85	.83
30x4.50-21	2.00	.83
28x4.75-19	2.05	.92
29x5.00-19	2.45	1.02
30x5.00-20	2.45	1.02
5.25-17	2.45	1.11
28x5.25-18	2.45	1.11
29x5.25-19	2.50	1.11
31x5.25-21	2.85	1.11
5.50-17	2.80	1.12
28x5.00-18	2.80	1.12
29x5.50-19	2.85	1.12
30x5.50-20	3.35	1.25
6.00-16	3.50	1.39
6.00-17	2.95	1.12
32x6.00-20	3.00	1.22
6.25-16	3.75	1.39
6.50-17	3.40	1.25
30x6.50-18	3.25	1.25
31x6.50-19	3.50	1.30
32x6.50-20	3.30	1.32
7.00-17	3.95	1.35
34x7.00-20	4.55	1.80

CORD TIRES

Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
30x3	$1.75	$0.73	34x4	2.85	.82
30x3 1-2	1.75	.73	32x4 1-2	$2.95	$1.12
32x3 1-2	2.60	.82	33x4 1-2	2.95	1.12
31x4	2.60	.82	34x4 1-2	2.95	1.12
32x4	2.60	.82	33x5	3.35	1.40
33x4	2.60	.82	35x5	3.45	1.60

HEAVY DUTY TRUCK TIRES

Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
34x5	$3.85	$1.95	34x7	$9.65	$3.20
30x6 8ply	5.25	1.90	36x8	10.45	3.90
32x6 8 ply	6.95	2.65	38x7	9.70	3.90
32x6 10 ply	7.95	2.65	40x8	12.35	4.05

TRUCK AND BUS BALLOONS

Size	Tire	Tube	Size	Tire	Tube
6.00x20	$3.10	$1.60	8.25x20	$7.45	$4.80
6.50x20	3.45	1.85	9.00x20	9.95	5.55
7.00x20	4.75	2.85	9.75x20	12.45	6.15
7.50x20	5.95	3.60	10.50x20	14.95	7.45

ALL OTHER SIZES — DEALERS WANTED

Send $1.00 deposit with each tire ordered. ($3.00 on each truck tire). Send Money Order or Cashiers Draft to insure quick shipment. Bal. C.O.D. **5% Discount** if you Send Cash in full with order. We may substitute brands of equal value if necessary. 12 months service or replace at one-half price. **All Tubes Guaranteed Brand New.**

ECONOMY TIRE & RUBBER COMPANY
Dept. M. C. 1615 Grand Avenue Kansas City, Mo.

Kidneys Must Clean Out Acids

The only way your body can clean out Acids and poisonous wastes from your blood is through 9 million tiny, delicate Kidney tubes or filters, but beware of cheap, drastic, irritating drugs. If functional Kidney or Bladder disorders make you suffer from Getting Up Nights, Nervousness, Leg Pains, Backache, Circles Under Eyes, Dizziness, Rheumatic Pains, Acidity, Burning, Smarting or Itching, don't take chances. Get the Doctor's guaranteed prescription called Cystex (Siss-Tex). Works fast, safe and sure. In 48 hours it must bring new vitality and is guaranteed to do the work in one week or money back on return of empty package. Cystex costs only 3c a dose at druggists and the guarantee protects you.

Which of These Gov't Jobs Do YOU Want?

Men—Women Start $1,200 to $2,100 a year!
Liquor-Gauger
Stenographer
Meat Inspector
Custom House
Office Clerk—Typist
Accountant
File Clerk
Income Tax Auditor

No special education or experience usually required. Steady work. Short hours. Vacations. PENSIONS! Age 18—50. Extra Social Security Jobs expected soon. Mail coupon for FREE book on how you can pass Civil Service Examination.

Arthur R. Patterson, (Former Gov't Examiner) Principal, PATTERSON SCHOOL, 724 Case Building, Rochester, N. Y. Send FREE book, "How to Secure a Government Position."

FREE BOOK

Name .....

Address .....

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Long Live the Emperor!

By GEORGES SURDEZ

Author of "Madame X of the Legion," "Clarions of Youth," etc.

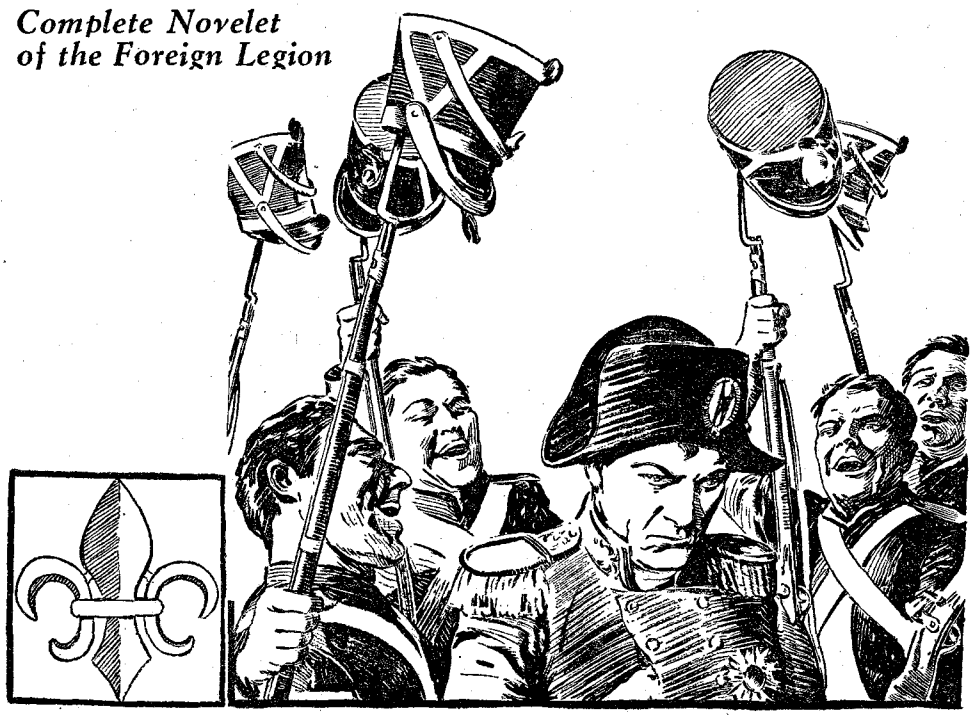
Complete Novelet of the Foreign Legion

I

DAWN was breaking over Paris. Since six o'clock of the preceding evening, that is for exactly twelve hours, ex-Legionnaire Cartaux had been future Legionnaire Cartaux. At that time he had decided to turn his back upon the ease, luxuries and independence of civilian existence to return to North Africa, there to resume his humble station under the flag of the Third French Republic.

At eight o'clock, the Paris recruiting office on the Rue Saint-Dominique would open to receive aspiring candidates, and he would be one of the first. Consequently Cartaux had a couple of hours to kill. He had left the miserable room in a shabby hotel very early, to avoid an unpleasant interview with the owner. He had left behind, within those four walls covered with leprous paper, an empty suitcase and many illusions. He had four francs remaining, enough for a breakfast of chocolate and rolls. Therefore he entered a small café near the Gare de l'Est and ordered a glass of rum.

The waiter served him, then resumed his task, cleaning a large mirror. He was still in his shirt sleeves, and looked at Cartaux with sleepy, suspicious eyes. Looking at his reflection, Cartaux did not blame him. Unshaved,



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

clad in a frayed suit, lacking a tie, wearing a rather greasy peaked cap and cord-soled sandals, future Legionnaire Cartaux did not give an impression of prosperity. In his pockets, his aimless fingers located a package of cigarettes, a box of matches and two coins, the change left him after paying the rum. That was his record after a year of civilian life.

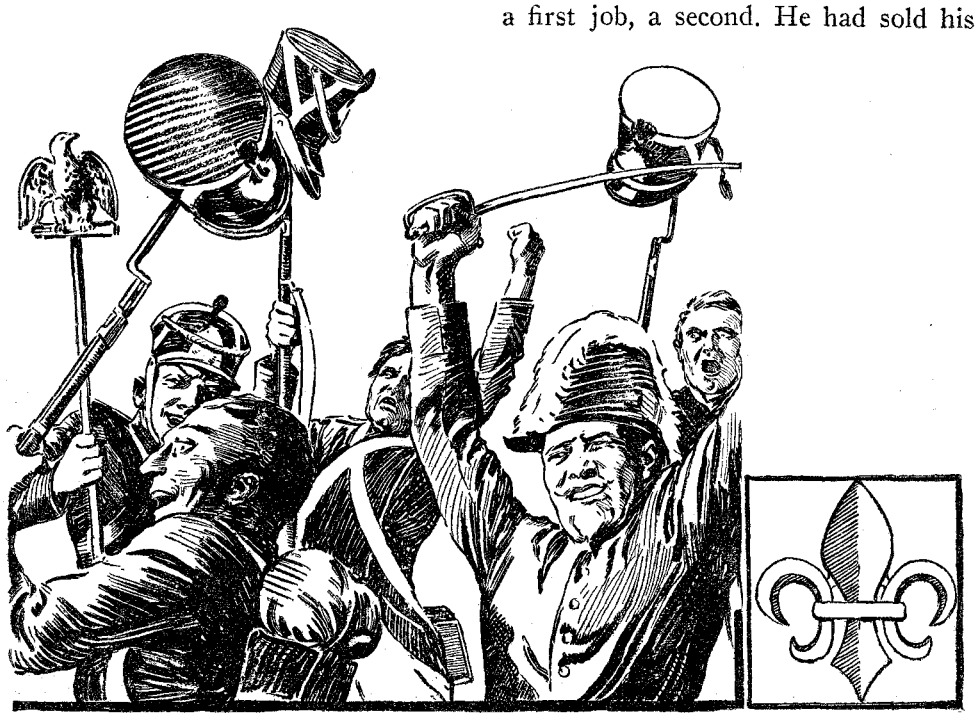
"The world is wide open for an alert, educated man," he mused bitterly. He had said those words, once. "Clever chap!"

When he had returned to the Regimental Depot at Sidi-bel-Abbès, after three years in Indo-China, his second enlistment had been over. Cartaux, a sergeant and the dandy of his battalion, due for promotion, had been called to the office by the captain commanding the transient company. The officer had told him the advantages of re-enlisting. But Cartaux had said:

"Not for me, Captain. You see, I have a good education. I enlisted at eighteen, because I was a kid who craved adventure. I was fed up with studies, with school. I've had enough of that adventure stuff. You'll say: 'Once a Legionnaire, always a Legionnaire.' That may be so for most, but I am somewhat different. The civilian world is wide open for an alert, educated man resolved to succeed."

The captain had smiled and offered his hand. "I hope so. Good bye."

Cartaux had had savings—a sergeant in the Tonkin can save some money. His family had greeted him cordially, at first. He had found work, in a bank. Then he had made a great discovery: Something other than youth had driven him to the Legion. He had needed discipline within himself; someone had to tell him when to eat and when to sleep, when to wash and when to work. The routine of ten years was in his bones, in his soul. He had lost a first job, a second. He had sold his



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good clothes for money to eat. He who was reputed a sober man in the Legion had taken to drinking sprees. His morale was gone.

So he was going back to the Legion, to start at the bottom again, to climb from private to sergeant, having wasted a year's actual time and the potentialities of five years.

"I'm going back to the Legion."

HE must have spoken aloud, for the waiter acknowledged it with a grin of pretended interest. Cartaux had gulped the rum, and asked for a glass of black coffee, which he could afford. He lighted a cigarette, and the smoke, the warmth of the liquid, flooded his being. He could almost feel the sun of Algeria on his broad back.

He was glad to go back, but his joy was marred by a thought: That captain was still in charge of the casuals at Sidi-bel-Abbès, and would laugh when Cartaux appeared. If only Cartaux could have gone back looking prosperous, with a good suit, good baggage, perhaps a cane and gloves, like a gentleman, he would have felt better. As it was, it would be obvious that he had been squeezed out of civilian life like a seed out of a grape.

"You're going to enlist in the Legion?"

Cartaux turned, nodding.

"Sit down. What will you have?"

"Rum, thanks—" Cartaux dropped into a chair before a small table already occupied by two men. He noted at once that they were out of place in this establishment frequented by chauffeurs, teamsters, workmen from the railroad station across the street. There was a tall chap, with broad shoulders, a reddish face, who was evidently a former non-com of the regular army. The other was short, rather stout, much older, at least fifty-five. His chin was lengthened by a short white beard trimmed to a point, he wore gold-rimmed glasses. His black coat, his expensive derby, his spats, indicated some refinement.

"What do you think, Greslin?"

"You might try, Doctor." The red-faced chap looked at his watch. "Our man probably got drunk on the advance money you paid to him, and won't show up."

Cartaux was puzzled, but waited for developments. The next questions startled him: "Your age? Height? Weight?"

He explained that he was twenty-nine, six feet one inch in height, and weighed somewhere around one hundred and eighty-five pounds. He said "somewhere" because he feared he had lost considerable poundage walking the streets in search of work the past month, feeding on cold meat and loaf bread.

"You've had military training?"

"Ten years of Legion."

"Are you quick to learn dates, names, historical data?"

"I passed the exams for *bachelier ès lettres* at seventeen," Cartaux stated. "You see, mine was not an ordinary case. I grew restless—"

The man called "doctor" held up a well-kept, plump hand. "Yes, yes." He peered at Cartaux alertly. "Name three cavalry leaders of the First Empire, please."

"Murat, Lasalle, Bessière," Cartaux said. "Furthermore, I'm reasonably familiar with the books of Thiers, Michelet, and at one time read stacks of memoirs, de Marbot and Jomini."

The doctor clucked his tongue and seemed very pleased. The red-faced man beamed.

"Are you in a hurry to get back to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Legion? I thought not. Necessity, eh? Look here, our regular salary is two hundred and fifty francs a month, with room and board. Your education and the additional help you could render make it possible for me to offer you five hundred francs."

"With room and board?" Cartaux asked. "Honest work?"

"Very honest work," the doctor smiled. "In a general way, to serve as a guard in a large private estate. You would have to wear a uniform—"

"A livery?" Cartaux stiffened.

"Let us say a costume. Which you will wear only when on duty. The hours are reasonable; two tricks of four hours usually, sometimes three. You will be fed extremely well, comfortably quartered, supplied with games for recreation. Twice a month, you will be driven to Paris for a twelve hours' stay, once every three months, you will be permitted to remain two days."

CARTAUX rested his elbows on the table. There was something odd about the proposition, he could not decide just what. More than anything else, it was too good. Almost a sergeant's pay, all found—for guard duty!

"Sounds good. What's the reverse side of the deal?"

"Something which sounds very easy but is rather difficult to obtain—discretion. The advantages are obvious—an opportunity to save money, with wine, tobacco, liquor within reason, supplied to you free. You will not have to spend a penny. Matter of fact, it will be impossible for you to. What we expect, aside from duties which you may find a trifle boring but very easy, is secrecy. You are not to ask questions, you shall not even know where you are. You will ask for no names save those that are given you. Your mail must be delivered to me unsealed, that I may see you do not mention anything you learn. To receive letters, give a Paris post office address. It will be possible for you to receive them with only a few hours of delay."

Cartaux shrugged. "Why all the mystery?"

"That's one question, already." The doctor smiled. "Let me assure you that everything concerned with this is absolutely legal. No harm will come to you. I am a private physician, not a research man; I carry out no weird experiment. I'm making this clear because you have heard me called 'Doctor' by my assistant, and both books and movies have made you suspicious of that title. You will have ten or twelve companions, who live like soldiers, soldiers in barracks. Did I not tell you that our high salary is due to secrecy? There is a village near the estate. A single visit there will mean your dismissal."

"Sounds mad to me, Doctor," Cartaux said.

"You will comprehend how accurate your estimate is," the man replied. "But it isn't madness that can possibly concern you. What do you say?"

"How long is the job for?"

"As long as you like it. But any time you wish to quit, you merely inform me—or fail to meet our car at the appointed time after a Paris leave. However, I think you'll be satisfied."

Cartaux was tempted. In two or three months, he could save enough cash for a relatively decent outfit, join the Legion not as a man obviously licked, but as a chap returning from choice. Such an ambition might appear pathetic to outsiders, but Legionnaires, whose universe is the Legion, will understand.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Moreover, Cartaux's curiosity was aroused. And the vague fear, the definite uneasiness, that he experienced was a challenge in itself. He offered his hand to bind the bargain.

II

"GRENADIER CARTAUX!" The former sergeant of the Foreign Legion came to attention, presenting arms with a long, heavy flintlock musket tipped with an "elbow" bayonet—all according to a manual out of use in the French Army for more than a century. Following instructions, he had shaved only from the lobes of the ears down. He wore a long coat, buttoned over the chest, then flaring open to reveal a white vest. His muscular legs seemed to be poured into his white breeches and white knee-length gaiters. Across his breast sloped broad belts of white leather, and a *giberne* stamped with a regimental badge hung against the small of his back. At his left side was a short saber with a shining brass hilt. But Cartaux's greatest glory was a gigantic fur bonnet, a bearskin trimmed with a long, colored plume.

But it seemed less of a masquerade because the uniform had been fitted on him, and made of fresh cloth while gun steel and weapons had been furbished until they appeared new, usable.

"Pretty good, pretty good," Greslin approved. "His Majesty should be satisfied!" The red-faced man wore a uniform also, that of a lieutenant of Grenadiers in the Old Guard of Napoleon I — gold epaulettes, copper *hausse-col* stamped with a number and the Eagle. "You remember what to say?" he asked Cartaux.

The two were standing face to face in the middle of a long, narrow room, an attic apartment whose sloping walls were pierced by Mansard windows. With its row of cots and the equipment hanging from wooden pegs, or piled on shelves, the place resembled a room in barracks. Six or seven men in bizarre costumes sprawled on the cots or straddled chairs. One still wore white gaiters and breeches, but had pulled on a sweater of orange wool. Another who wore a felt hat over his bald skull, might have posed for De Neuville from the neck down. He smoked a cigarette, something strictly forbidden in the yard or the park, where only cigars and pipes could be used. Rolled cigarettes in paper had been unknown in the days of the First Emperor.

These spectators had looked up from games of checkers and cards, from detective magazines and radio literature, to laugh at the novice, Cartaux. The discipline was not strict, and Greslin was treated more as a foreman than an officer.

"If His Majesty notices me, Lieutenant, and honors me with a few questions, I am Cartaux, Louis-Paul, First Grenadier of the Guard, formerly in Lannes' Corps. I enlisted, Year II of the Republic, in the Haute-Saônne Demi-Brigade. His Majesty had spoken to me before, once on Lobau Island, on the eve of Wagram, and once when I stood guard in the Tuileries Palace, before the apartment of Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress—"

"Greta Garbo!" prompted a voice.

"Friquet, that'll cost you five francs fine," Greslin snapped. "If you make Cartaux think this is funny and he laughs at the wrong time, he will have to be fired, and we'll have had a couple of thousand francs of expenses for nothing."

"I've learned not to laugh out of turn," Cartaux reassured him. "I've

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had comical officers in my time! Now, is this present-arms all right?"

"Move up that forefinger a bit nearer the trigger-guard. And don't hold your chin so high. That shoves your fur bonnet backward—and it looks lousy. That's it, that's it! Now, you've memorized the dates, so that if he is before the Russian Campaign you won't say you fought at Borodino?"

"Sure. I studied the papers the doctor gave me."

"Come along, then."

CARTAUX followed Greslin out of the room, down a narrow, steep stairway. The ceiling was high on the floor below, and he shouldered the long musket. Greslin halted and adjusted his officer's shako, then he assumed a brisk, military step, his left hand holding the sword scabbard. This was an unnecessary refinement of caution, as Napoleon seldom visited the upper stories, and never without the warning gong ringing in barracks. Electricity was used, but ornate candelabras were on the walls, with candles ready to be lighted.

The two men's heavy soles hammered on the parquet floor. In a way, Cartaux was enjoying himself. He had arrived that afternoon after a long drive, and he had judged from occasional glimpses of road signs, that he was somewhere in a valley of the mountainous Auvergne. He had seen the vast park, the massive castle, which he knew as Fontainbleau.

All perturbation had left him when he had met his co-employees. They were all tall, massive, mature men, and, without exception, ex-soldiers. They had given him explanations.

In short, they were hired to guard a maniac, a man who suffered from the delusion that he was Napoleon I. But not one of them was sure whether Napoleon hired them, or whether he was in ignorance of their real identity. Not a single one admitted knowing the madman's real name. That meant dismissal. That he was very rich could not be doubted. There were fourteen men posing as soldiers, and probably as many lackeys' servants in gold-braided liveries, with powdered wigs and silk stockings. In addition there were the cooks and their aides, stable-hands, the chauffeur, who kept out of sight, the doctor, an assistant, a secretary.

One of the pseudo-Grenadiers, Friquet, estimated that the payroll alone amounted to over sixty thousand francs a month. Then there was the food—excellent, copious — the wine and liquors, the tobacco, the hundreds of candles kept burning all night long on the lower floors, attended by a man wielding long-handled snuffers.

"Some cracked millionaire," Friquet thought.

Some one whispered the possibility that the man they watched was Deschanel, ex-president of the French Republic. But the description did not fit, and Cartaux knew that Deschanel was dead. Or as good as dead, since he had been admittedly insane.

"He's a pretty good guy at that—even if he is a nut," Friquet informed Cartaux. "Call him 'Sire,' tell him a hard luck story about your father's farm being raided by the Cossacks. He'll give you a handful of gold coins. The doctor will redeem them from you at face value, franc for franc, which is robbery at the present rate. But they find it hard to get a new supply, so it must go back to him."

GRESLIN and Cartaux reached the next floor by a wider stairway, and came to the gallery leading to the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Emperor's apartment. It had been a long time since the ex-Legionnaire had read Frederic Masson, Cabanes and the many authors who have written of Napoleon. Nevertheless, he saw that the setting—furniture, hangings, paintings—was accurate. Whether the Gros's and the David's were genuine was beyond his knowledge.

There was a grenadier on duty at the top of the monumental stairway leading from the ground floor, and another before a massive double door at the end of the gallery. Steps clicked on the polished floor, there was an exchange of muffled words, the banging of musket butts, a swift little military comedy.

Then Cartaux was on duty, before the double door. He had stood guard in much less comfortable places than this long hall, but the awareness that this was "play" and not the real thing led to a swift boredom. There was another man at the head of the stairs now, but instructions were that the two could not converse. As a matter of fact, the stairway sentry was often out of sight, around a bend of the wall.

Somewhere, a clock struck slowly, wearily—Ten o'clock. Cartaux recalled that twenty-four hours before he had been seated on the edge of the sagging bed in his cheap room. He had been gloomy, depressed and broke. Now he was snugly dressed in broadcloth, had eaten chicken for dinner, and was being paid over sixteen francs a day! He had also been promised the chevrons of sergeant, after Napoleon had seen and approved of him. That was quick promotion!

But he was ready to complain because he was bored, because there was a draft skidding along the floor, seeping in from somewhere. Voices came to him from the other side of the door. Then footsteps echoed in the hall. A footman in uniform was coming toward Cartaux. He was very near, and Cartaux wondered whether he was supposed to challenge him or leave him alone.

"I was rung for, old man," the fellow explained. He struck a match and lighted the candles on a seven-branched candle stick he had brought. Then he struck the door lightly, opened it, stood to one side and waited. He winked at Cartaux in a friendly fashion. This—his wink said—was all part of the crazy business. Cartaux noticed that he wore an aluminum ring on his left hand, one like those made in the trenches during the Great War. An anachronism, if ever there was one!

Now a man whom Cartaux recognized as the doctor appeared. He wore a dress uniform with a gold-hilted sword and he carried a plumed hat under his left arm. He emerged from the room backward, bowing. When he straightened he kept his face toward the front until the footman closed the door.

"Very well, Abel, await me by the stairs." The servant obeyed, and the doctor addressed Cartaux, "*Eh bien,* my brave fellow. Satisfied with your lot?" Then he added in a whisper, "By the way, if he comes out, ever, and talks reasonably—refers to the present, you understand—do not behave as if you were surprised. Just push a button you'll find under the right hanging of the third window. That will inform me."

"Greslin has instructed me already, *monsieur le docteur.*"

"Right. Good night."

THE doctor left. Cartaux walked up and down for perhaps an hour. Through the windows of the gallery, he could see the moonlit park, the dark

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

silhouettes of the tall trees. Suddenly, the sentry at the stairway left his post and walked toward him. He was a big, placid fellow with a freckled face.

"Want a smoke?" he asked in a low voice.

"Against regulations, isn't it?"

"Oh, what the devil—" The other laughed. "My name's Fervrier. I've been here eighteen months, and I know what's what." He leaned his musket against the wall and removed his bonnet, producing a package of cigarettes from its lining. "See—but I was forgetting." Fervrier stepped to the double door and took a metal rod from his pocket. This was slotted at the ends and fitted the handles snugly. "I had this made," said Fervrier. "He can't open suddenly. When you hear him coming for the door, drop your cigarette down the musket barrel and remove that bar. He thinks the door sticks, that's all. Moreover, he doesn't come out more than one night a week. I think the sawbones gives him a sleeping potion. Come—let's sit down."

He sank into one of the double seats, crossing one leg over the other. Cartaux had accepted a cigarette, and was now smoking contentedly.

"Greslin's supposed to inspect us every four hours, but catch him getting up. The doctor comes around once in a while, but he lives downstairs and you can hear him coming in plenty of time. Want something to read?" Cartaux was astonished to see Fervrier open a large white-leather cartridge-box revealing magazines and papers. There were also small parcels of food and a bottle of wine.

"How do you get rid of the papers or magazines?" Cartaux wondered.

"This way—" Fervrier folded a paper, reached back of the seat, and passed it between the upholstering and a wooden supporting slat. "This isn't a bad dump, you know. Some of the outside guys, gardeners and all that, are married and live on the grounds beyond the park. Once you get to know your way around, you can have some fun and pass up your leave. They pay you extra if you do."

"Thanks for putting me wise."

"Don't mention it—" Fervrier grinned broadly. "I thought it best to tip you off—save me playing soldier."

III

TIME passed quickly as they sat side by side, smoking, chatting, reading marvelous tales of crime and adventure in the cheap publications brought by Fervrier. At two o'clock, Greslin was supposed to change the guards. But it was almost three before Friquet and a companion appeared, trailing their muskets, coming from upstairs with cigarettes between their teeth, casual and cheerful.

"About time you showed up," Fervrier grumbled.

"We were playing checkers and forgot." Friquet indicated the door with his thumb. "Well, how's the monkey tonight?"

"Not a sign of him. Better open the window, the smoke's plain." Fervrier removed his bar, which Friquet replaced with one of his own. "Good night," he said and they walked upstairs.

"Say, Fervrier— If he does come out, what am I supposed to do?"

"Present arms, that's all, and answer his questions. You'll get special instructions if you're put in charge downstairs —at the front door."

The freckled man halted before a slate suspended against the door of Greslin's room, in the attic, scrawled *Nothing new,* and added his initials.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You're supposed to write it down if he comes out and talks, and add, 'Calm, agitated, or angry'—whatever he was. That's so Greslin can report by phone to the doctor when he wakes up. If you want my candid opinion, all of this is a money-grabbing scheme of that doctor, under guise of treatment. But as long as I get mine and it hurts nobody, what do I care? That monkey won't try to get away."

They entered the barracks room and undressed.

"What do you do if you're downstairs on duty and he comes down?"

"If you're sentry at the door, you call out the guard. There's a corporal and three men in the guard-room right nearby. The corporal pushes a button, and while we're presenting arms and exchanging compliments, the doctor comes on the run. As I told you, I've been here a year and a half, and he never went downstairs. Walks up and down the gallery, opens a window and stares out, shoots a little bull at whoever's on guard, and goes back to bed. So, most of the time, everybody snoozes in the guard-room. Except every three months, when the committee comes."

"The committee?" Cartaux prompted.

"Don't know what they are, or who they are. But they come around the third day of every third month, ten or twelve of them. Mostly men, rather oldish fellows, dressed in black, as for a funeral. There are three women, too. One about fifty, supposed to be his sister. One about forty, supposed to be his wife. One about twenty, supposed to be his daughter. We don't know for sure. They all go into his apartment accompanied by the doctor and Greslin, never by any of us. When they're here, you have to be on the watch, because they room on the third floor."

"What goes on in the apartment?" Cartaux pressed him. "I mean—when they see him? Have you any idea?"

"Well, they must argue with him, because he usually has a fit. Throws things around, smashes furniture, yells. I heard some of it once, from the outer hall. He was saying: 'Nothing has changed. My family, living on my charity, conspires for my ruin! My wife is a shrew, my sister's a goose, and the daughter is a very Messalina! I'll exile you all! As for you, gentlemen, the firing-squad!' "

"Thinks he's Napoleon, all right."

Fervrier turned his head, already resting on the pillow. "Why? Did Napoleon get a raw deal from his women? A smart guy like him, lousy with dough! Women have no sense."

With this remark Grenadier Fervrier, ex-gunner in the Fifth Artillery Regiment, went to sleep. Cartaux remained awake longer, stirred by curiosity. What was the "committee"? Did "Napoleon" insult its members in his imaginary character, or did he tell the contemporary truth? There was comfort to be derived from the knowledge that save when that committee stopped at the *château,* his work would not be tedious. He would locate a couple of good books that fitted into the deep pockets in his coat-tails.

In any case, this was the queerest job he had ever held. It would make a splendid yarn when he went back to the Legion. A fine story with but one drawback: Who, in the Legion, would believe that he had been well paid to eat, sleep and read? And his last thought that night was definite regret that he probably would be forbidden to have his photograph taken in his fine uniform.

That was a pity, really.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IT WAS on the ninth night of guard that Cartaux encountered the Emperor. Friquet, who was on duty at the stairs, heard steps, rose, slipped his cigarette butt into his musket barrel, and tiptoed back to his post. Cartaux removed the iron bar from the door's handles and slipped it into a pocket. Despite himself, his heart pounded in his chest, just as it had when he had been on night patrol.

The door opened, and Cartaux uttered, in a loud voice, "The Emperor—" And Friquet echoed, from his post, "The Emperor!" There was a third call due, from the sentry downstairs, but Cartaux did not hear it.

The maniac had emerged from the apartment. He was taller than Cartaux had expected, five feet eight or nine, at least three inches taller than Napoleon had been. His shoulders were narrow and lean, his legs thin in the white leather breeches and silk stockings. His abdomen distended his waistcoat like a huge egg. But his face bore a certain resemblance to the famous warrior, and this was enhanced by a black curl plastered on the forehead. Cartaux thought he might be forty-three or forty-four years old.

Cartaux presented arms.

"Grenadier, the password for tonight?"

"Marengo-Dessaix, your Imperial Majesty."

The eyes were gray-blue, extraordinarily penetrating and clear. They held Cartaux's glance, then inspected him slowly. "I have seen you before—where?"

"Lobau Island, Sire. And several times at the Tuileries Palace, where I stood guard before Her Imperial Majesty's Apartment."

"I recall. In 1810. Where did you win the Cross?"

"Storming of Eckmühl, Sire."

"Brave fellow. . . ."

Napoleon strode down the gallery to the stairs. Friquet leaped into view, presented arms. The Emperor reached up and touched the lobe of his right ear in a friendly gesture, then walked jerkily on. For a moment, Cartaux was carried away by the illusion. That silhouette in the green coat of the Guard *Chasseurs* was tremendously familiar. Thus he had imagined it as a boy—an odd blending of the lean Bonaparte and the stout Caesar.

The Emperor threw open a window and stared into the park. Down below there was a rattle of weapons, footsteps. The guard-room was awake. Napoleon resumed his stroll, up and down, down and up, and each time he passed Cartaux or Friquet, the musket would lift, the bayonet glitter in the light of the candles. The smart sound of his steps was as if punctuated by the impact of the butt striking the floor.

Minutes passed monotonously. At last, almost an hour later, light footsteps ascended the stairs. A man whom Cartaux had never seen appeared, his clean-shaven lips and chin stern and set between sideburns. He wore a gala uniform and carried an enormous portfolio under his left arm. He bowed before Napoleon.

"I have the dispatches, Sire!"

"Good, good, Berthier! What does Masséna say?"

"I shall submit his report, just arrived by special courier, Sire. As a whole, the situation is secure, although—"

The two, Emperor and secretary, vanished into the room. The door closed. Friquet drew near and said in a whisper, "That guy will play with him for a couple of hours. Say, he's got

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a swell job. Gets at least two thousand a month! Greslin says he used to be a professor of history."

THE same scene, with very few variations, was repeated twenty times in the following five months. Cartaux saw the arrival of the "committee." Its members arrived in automobiles, but these remained parked outside the estate, and Cartaux was informed that conversation with their chauffeurs meant immediate discharge.

Physically, Cartaux had never been so comfortable in his life. The chef was excellent and obviously scorned to prepare different foods for different classes of employees. Truffled roast goose, fine omelettes, and enormous roasts appeared on the mess table. But there were three hours of drill for each man, every other day, to keep him from growing fat and sluggish. However, Cartaux was not saving as much as he had expected. He was still a Legionnaire at heart, existing for the moment, and his half-days in Paris were costly.

Then, one night, about one o'clock, the steps of the Emperor were heard nearing the door. The bar was removed and Fervrier, who was on stairway duty, scuttled back to his post. Napoleon appeared. He halted before Cartaux with hands locked behind his back, a very human smile on his lips.

"Well, well, Grenadier Cartaux? And how are you?"

"In perfect health, Sire."

"You smoke too much, however. For I take it you smoke as much off duty as on duty, eh? Cigarettes are bad for your lungs in such quantities, you know."

"Cigarettes, Your Majesty?"

"Cigarettes, My Majesty, sure." Napoleon chuckled amiably. "Attention —ground arms—" Cartaux obeyed promptly, smacking his butt on the parquet loudly. "Grenadier Cartaux, Louis-Paul, once of Lannes' Corps, decorated for valor at Eckmühl, arms —*reverse!*"

Cartaux started to perspire. "Reverse, Your Majesty?"

"Reverse arms, butt up, muzzle down, old chap." Napoleon was laughing silently. "Can't do it, eh? Why? Because you have exactly eight butts, from eight cigarettes smoked in three hours." He crossed to the double seat nearest him, plunged his hand behind it and brought out a copy of an illustrated magazine. "Proof, proof! You know, I am not supposed to see this. Look at the date on it. I've been dead for one hundred and some years! Grenadier Fevrier"—the whisper carried far—"come here. . . ."

Fervrier arrived and saw at once that something unusual was going on. But Napoleon stilled him with a gesture. He led them both to one of the massive panels of the door and indicated a tiny hole.

"I watched you through this. Made it myself—gives me something to do when I can't sleep, you understand. You squeal on me, I squeal on you. They change the guards, sack you." He stared at them, grinning, shaking with amusement. "Who's nutty, eh? Who's nutty? Come on, let's have a cigarette. I get sick and tired of snuff—"

Cartaux gave him a cigarette, the stupefied Fervrier supplied a light. Napoleon inhaled, blew smoke through his nostrils. "You know, in this rig, one can't help being a bit theatrical. For instance, no inside pockets on these breeches. You have to stick the hand inside the vest. Funny eh?"

"Your Majesty—" Cartaux faltered.

"Call me Gaston. Or Monsieur Gaston if you must be respectful. Of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

course, you may push the button, and I'll show this magazine, your butts, and you get fired. Or you can come in with me and have a drink. Don't worry, I'm not allowed to have poison about."

THEY followed him into the nearest room. It was luxuriously furnished, there were paintings on the walls; rich hangings covered the windows. The light cast by an ornate lamp on a large desk, the surface of which was chipped and marred by the strokes of a penknife, was soft and pleasant. Napoleon stepped over to a chest and swung a door open revealing a liquor *cabaret* (whether in the correct period or not Cartaux did not know). He brought a large glass and a squat bottle.

"By the way—" the Emperor grinned joyously, "you chaps look as mad as I do, you know! I'm not the only one in fancy garb, eh? I'm supposed to be alone, so we better use only one glass. Fervrier, you're first." He filled the glass to the brim, and the grenadier drank it down.

"That's nice stuff," he declared.

"Should be. 1811 Cognac—" The odd man chuckled. "Three years old, you see! Cartaux—"

Cartaux had his drink, then Napoleon—or Gaston—took one.

"I've been watching you fellows for some time," he said. "I envied you. Tonight, I had to talk to someone—anyone." He indicated the leather-covered books, the sheaves of maps and papers. "One gets awfully bored with all this. Still, when one has small choice—you understand. I'd sooner go on living, like this, than be put out of the way."

For some moments, a great light had illuminated Cartaux's brain: This man was not insane. He was a victim.

"Listen, Monsieur Gaston, job or no job—" he hesitated. "If there is anyone you wish to send word to outside—quietly—we'll do it."

The other smiled, shrugged wearily. "Send word to whom?" he wondered. "My family? They wish me out of the way. Old friends? They'd go through legal channels, and there is enough money involved to make any alienist declare me mad. And at the first move I make that *they* learn about, I shall get very, very sick. You've heard of the *Man in the Iron Mask?* He had nothing wrong; his very existence was his crime. That is my case."

"But suppose you escaped?"

"I'm insane, I tell you. They could prove it legally. So I would have to hide. To live, you must have money. I would have to work. And I know nothing, save unusable curious facts concerning—my folly. And I shall tell you nothing more. You two would be —you would be discharged." The man laughed quietly and then added in a tone that shot shudders up and down his listeners' spines, "There are *discharged* men scattered about the park." He pushed them out of the room. "Better go before your absence is noticed."

The double doors locked behind them.

Fervrier mopped his forehead. "He kept that magazine— Say, what do you think? Do we report or don't we?"

"And get the sack?" Cartaux asked.

"That's right. . . ."

IV

FOR the following few days, Cartaux did not feel at ease. He wandered about the park, looking suspiciously at fresher sod near the foot of the enclosing wall. There was something sinister, after all, about this whole business. It gave him night-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mares. He decided to quit—as soon as he had saved a thousand francs. As for saving the unfortunate prisoner, he dropped the thought. The man was beaten in advance, was afraid of death, rightly or wrongly, and would act according to his doctor's instructions.

For a time, Napoleon resumed his ordinary routine, went out for long walks with his secretary, dictated proclamations and army orders in a sharp, rapid voice. Twice, he popped out of his quarters at night, but as Napoleon, not as Gaston. Perhaps he feared to reveal himself to Friquet, who was on the stairway.

For some reason, he evidently had selected Cartaux and Fervrier as his friends, for when the two were teamed once more, he emerged, asked for cigarettes, and chatted with them. He invited one or the other in for a drink, and even pointed out that he had ordered some particularly fine dishes to save for them. One of them was always left outside, with instructions to rap with his musket butt at the first suspicious sound.

The moments that Cartaux spent in the Emperor's study had a queer charm. There were unusual practices, such as using the musket barrel for an ash receiver. With both, it was an automatic gesture to step to where the gun was leaning against the desk, to flick the ashes down its length.

Gaston-Napoleon encouraged Cartaux to talk. As he pointed out, he himself had nothing to tell—except dangerous information. But he was interested in the outside world. And Cartaux told him of his childhood, of his father, a Government employee, of his vacations on his grandmother's farm in Burgundy. He spoke of his years of school in Dijon and Paris and of the decade spent in the Legion.

"The Legion—" Napoleon would say, curiously. "Founded ten years or so after"—a smile—"my death. What is the present Legion like?"

Cartaux, like all Legionnaires, never tired talking about the Corps. He traced its recent history in glowing terms—Sahara, Riff, Syria, Middle Atlas, Grand Atlas. Pitched combats against organized foes, night skirmishes against raiders of the hills. He told how men had enlisted at the beginning of one month, at the Rue Saint-Dominique or in Versailles, to be killed, already Legionnaires, on the slopes of the Moroccan front before four weeks had elapsed.

"Matter of luck, you see. Some stay five years and never see action. And some are killed within a few days. But you take all the stories in those things"—Cartaux indicated the big volumes beyond the desk—"and they hold nothing more heroic than what we have done. In the Legion, a man feels that he *is* somebody."

Napoleon would open old-fashioned Atlases, covered with forgotten names, and try to trace the recent campaigns. Cartaux promised to purchase modern maps, on his next leave to Paris, and smuggle them in. And, while talking, he would eat great quantities of cold roast chicken and golden bread, washing it down with bottles of excellent wine. And he was happy to note that Napoleon seemed to prefer his company to that of Fervrier. The big chap did not stay in more than thirty minutes at a time.

"He's nuts," he'd confess to Cartaux. "But do you think he's dangerous? Does he try to give you things?"

"He did, at first," Cartaux said loftily. "But I take no tips from a man who's my friend."

"I'm not so fussy," Fervrier ad-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mitted without shame. "For instance, he gave me this. What do you think it's worth?" He held out a gold snuff box. "He said I could get five thousand for it anywhere, three times that much from some guy who knows. What do you think?"

"Looks like an antique, all right."

"Listen, I'll split halves with you when I get it sold, eh?"

"You're a pal," Cartaux exclaimed, after a brief inner struggle.

When gifts reached that value, they ceased being humiliating, as any Legionnaire admits. He had seen that box, but Napoleon had never offered him more than a gold coin. That had been easy to refuse. He did not blame Fervrier. And what a fine, honest chap he was, offering to split!

Fervrier went to Paris, on leave for twelve hours. When he returned, the next day, he handed Cartaux a hundred francs. "Gold-plated junk, that's all. I got two hundred and fifty, but this is all I had left when I met the car. I'll make up for it later."

"Don't be a sap. You're doing me a favor as it is," Cartaux protested.

IT was three nights after that that Cartaux and Fervrier were on guard together again. And, at one-thirty in the morning, Napoleon opened the doors and beckoned to Cartaux. The Grenadier produced the humorous magazines he had collected, sat down beside the desk as usual. For many minutes, the conversation was normal, then Cartaux grew uneasy. The other's eyes were fastened on his own so steadily that he grew annoyed.

"What's the matter?" he asked, at last.

"Very little," the maniac replied. "Only that my secretary and the doctor have evidently been called to town —because my summons have failed to bring them. Greslin, consequently, has broken the rules, and is spending the night in the village. And downstairs, the entire guard-room is snoring like one man. When the cat is away, the mice are at play."

"Including the two of us," Cartaux agreed, honestly.

"Yes, yes—a couple of mice. What a night for an escape, eh? All that would be necessary—a powerful automobile waiting outside, and your complicity. But you are an honest man, Grenadier Cartaux, and you refused money. Honest men are not to be trusted. I would prefer to capture you."

He toyed with a cigarette, struck a match. Cartaux smiled. He was much stronger than Napoleon could be, even if driven by maniacal impulse. And the fool had said himself that he would not escape because he had no place to go, no one to appeal to.

"You laugh. You think I could not capture you?" Napoleon had gone around the end of the desk and he now held the burnt match over the musket barrel. "It could be done, noiselessly, surely—like this"— With an incredibly rapid movement, he gripped the gun, presented the tip of the bayonet against Cartaux's Adam's apple, so close that the guard could feel the metal against his skin. "It's an old bayonet, but very sharp. You must not move."

Cartaux realized this without being told. "Take it easy," he suggested, the perspiration starting down his face. "I won't interfere with you."

"I don't think you will." Napoleon stamped his foot loudly.

Cartaux supposed this noise would attract Fervrier's attention, and he feared that the other's appearance would be the signal for his death.

"Grenadier Cartaux, a madman is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not responsible for his deeds. I can push this, straighten up and laugh. Amusing, isn't it?" Napoleon did not turn as Fervrier entered, but said, "All right, tie him up."

And to Cartaux's bewilderment, Fervrier obeyed, not answering his friend's curses. The last precaution was a handkerchief, rolled into a ball and carefully stuffed between his tongue and his palate. A stout string held it in place. Impossible to chew it away, as his jaws would not meet.

MEANWHILE, Napoleon was undressing rapidly, opening small parcels taken from desk drawers and talking constantly.

"You were halfway honest and too smart. You might have sold me out for a larger sum than I could gather. Fervrier showed you the box on which he raised funds at my orders, in case you noticed it among his belongings, or missed it from that desk. He collected ten thousand on it, at an address I supplied him. I ought to know, fifteen years ago I paid thirty thousand for that box in the same place. That was before they could point to a harmless passion as evidence of insanity. You tell them that they'll never locate me, and that they can go to the devil to get the signature they need three or four times a year."

The man was dressing in modern civilian garments, and the change was astonishing. When he was ready, a felt hat on his head, he helped Fervrier to gather various articles in a big satchel. Snuff boxes, gold candlesticks, medals. He trotted into the other rooms, returned with his arms laden.

"And two thousand for this silver pen—and eight thousand for this sword hilt—I guess we'll have enough to live on, eh? They think me even crazier than they say I am—not realizing I knew the value of these things I collected myself!"

Suddenly, he halted in front of Cartaux, smiling impishly. He held a Cross of the Legion of Honor. "Grenadier Cartaux, the French Empire, as represented by my august self, bestows upon you this decoration, badge of good service and valor." He twisted Cartaux's ear very hard. "And you can always boast to your comrades that the Emperor pinched your ear. You remember that I always do that when I am pleased."

For no good reason, probably because he felt that he had treated a friend shabbily, Fervrier seemed to detest Cartaux. He mumbled curses and struck him in the face several times, one punch bringing the blood from his nostrils. Choking, dazed, the ex-Legionnaire felt a surge of gratitude when Napoleon intervened and ordered the guard to cease.

Then the doors closed softly; all was quite still.

Much later, Cartaux heard the drone of a powerful motor on the road. The long hours flowed by.

V

"YOU want us to find your man, yet you tie our hands by asking us for secrecy," the Special Commissioner of Police shouted. He gesticulated before the doctor and Greslin. "I know, I know—I have received instructions from the Ministry of Justice. But unless we use a telegraphic alarm, we cannot get prompt results. We have had men, as suggested by your employee,"—he indicated Cartaux—"at the recruiting offices of the Legion in Paris and at Versailles. And as soon as you authorize us, we will send out circulars everywhere, giving an exact

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

description, but using a false name and a false motive."

"We'll wait a few hours longer," the doctor said.

"As you wish. But do not expect the impossible."

Cartaux had been brought to Paris in the doctor's car, and had spent the last two nights at Police Headquarters. At the start, despite his bruised face, he had been suspected of complicity. But when it had been discovered that Fervrier had stolen his money and his new clothes, suspicion toward him had dwindled.

In twenty-four hours the police had located the car and chauffeur hired by Fervrier for the escape. A short time later Fervrier had been picked up as he sought to dispose of some antique jewelry. The doctor, Greslin, and Cartaux had identified him. The former Legionnaire had experienced some pleasure as he witnessed the questioning of the freckled man, conducted with that decorous gentleness in use by policemen the world over.

"I don't know, I don't know. . . ." Fervrier protested, tearfully. "He gave me the slip the first morning, after we had sold the first batch of stuff. Yes, he collected half, about fifteen thousand francs. He told me that he was going to America."

Paris had swallowed the fugitive, he had vanished like a stone tossed into the sea. There was a reward of ten thousand francs for information leading to his capture. But, as the Commissioner remarked, one million might be offered to the first man to leap to the moon.

The official pointed to Cartaux. "We won't need him any more. And you better make sure he doesn't talk to the reporters. They're around; they smell something fresh."

The doctor led Cartaux into another room of Police Headquarters. He was polite, not unfriendly, but quite firm. "You know the name of my patient, by now?"

"Yes, Doctor. Gaston Charlier-Barres."

"Very probably the name means little to you. They, the family, do not go in for advertising themselves. But they control banks, steamship companies, steel mills, mines. Gaston is the senior member of the lot just now. He was, and officially remains on the boards of directors of a dozen major enterprises. Three years ago, his mind broke. He imagined at first that his wife was unfaithful to him, that his daughter was not his own. He had always been an admirer of Napoleon—and suddenly he imagined that he was Napoleon. He started putting his servants in imperial liveries, insisting upon being addressed as 'Sire.' It became evident that he was mad.

"Fortunately, there was money enough to cover him up. Madness cannot be admitted. It would ruin his daughter's chances, and cause a terriffic upset in many companies. So I was asked to handle the case, effect a cure if possible, meanwhile humoring him. At rare intervals, he is normal. That is, he knows who he is in reality, can be persuaded to meet his partners, sign documents. Such lucid moments appear to follow a well defined cycle.

"On occasions, for a short period, his madness alters. He knows his identity, but believes himself the victim of persecution. That is why we asked our men to report his behavior carefully. This period lasts from a week to ten days. He is in one of these spells now. And we'd like to find him before he—shifts back to Napoleon again.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Cartaux," the doctor continued, "you haven't been honest with me. I don't blame you, because you could not know who was telling the truth. Our calling the police into the case should show you that we fear nothing. I am telling you all this so you will understand that once the name is public, the harm is done; and there would be no use trying to obtain money."

Cartaux reddened, clenched his fists. "I'm no blackmailer—I—"

"I'm not accusing you. This is merely the routine followed when we discharge a man. We would be very grateful to you if you would leave Paris for a while. Long enough to forget." The doctor smiled meaningly.

"I know you are backed by the Ministry of Justice," Cartaux said. "Well—I am broke again. The cold weather's coming on, and I'd like to go south."

"It's a pleasure to deal with you, Cartaux," the doctor told him. "Greslin will put you on a train for Marseilles, fare paid. And here's two hundred francs."

IN Marseilles, Cartaux decided to enlist for the Legion at Fort Saint-Jean. He entered a small café outside the old structure, on the quay of the Old Port, and, as he had expected, found acquaintances.

"Captain Choubel still at the Depot Company?" Cartaux asked.

"Yes. Leaving for Tonkin next month."

Cartaux almost decided to eke along for a month more. But he fought down his foolish pride. No one could predict what would happen to him if he drifted about this old town for thirty days, unemployed and aimless.

"I'll be glad to see Tonkin," he said. "Used to be in his—"

He broke off. Gaston-Napoleon was seated in a corner! He was all alone, with a glass and a bottle before him. He had become a blond and was garbed in a loosely-fitted hospital uniform, but Cartaux could not be mistaken. His first sensation was one of satisfaction that his hunch had been correct: the fellow had remembered where he could find shelter without too many explanations.

Casually he questioned one of his companions, a man employed as a scribe in the fort's office, and was told that the "blond" was a recruit for the Legion, Adolphe Friquet—that was further proof—forty-one years old, profession horticulturist. He had enlisted at Macon.

"He's under observation," the man continued, "—acts a little nutty. The captain wants to have him pass the medical test again."

Cartaux went out. He was puzzled. Gaston had enlisted in the Legion, was a Legionnaire and according to traditions, he was now sacred—no other Legionnaire could reveal anything about him. If the Legion had accepted him as sane, that was enough. But there was doubt already—and the confidential circulars would be on the way very soon. Was it worth losing ten thousand francs, this exaggerated loyalty? But Cartaux passed the telegraph office four times and did not enter.

At two-thirty, he entered Fort Saint-Jean and reported himself ready for medical examination. The scribe filled out a blank, chatting as he wrote:

"You remember the queer looking bird in the *bistro?* Well, at noon, he bursts in on the captain and orders the whole garrison out for a review. And he says that this place is a dirty hole, a disgrace to the French Army. That isn't so crazy at that. But the cap-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tain tells him to get out. 'Don't you recognize your Emperor?' the guy says. 'I'll have you degraded for impudence, you peasant lout!' The captain rose, kicked him out, yelling, 'There you go, and long live the Emperor!' Well—the egg calls on the sentries to arrest the captain, so that he can be shot at once, even sooner. Then the captain locks him up and he's going to notify the civilian authorities. Eh—where are you going?"

THREE days later, all was settled. Napoleon was on his way back to his palace in the hills.

Somehow, because Cartaux had been connected with the man's guard, he only collected five thousand francs. It was his last deal with civilians for a long time, and he was glad of it. But he was satisfied, for he could achieve the ambition of all Legionnaires—a picturesque return to the Corps.

He crossed the Mediterranean as a private citizen, first-class. He occupied a first-class compartment on the train from Oran to Sidi-bel-Abbès.

He was the personification of the successful civilian, from the Italian felt hat on his head to the British brogues on his feet. His hands were gloved, he carried a stick, smoked a cigar. And he deposited a handsome valise of pig leather at the *Poste de Police,* while waiting for the sergeant in charge.

"Captain Choubel?" he asked.

"This way, sir," the sergeant said. He was favorably impressed. When Cartaux entered the office, the captain rose and scanned his visitor's face.

"We have met before, I believe—"

"Why, yes, *mon capitaine.*" Cartaux stripped the glove from his right hand, clasped the officer's fingers. "I was a sergeant in your company, about two years ago."

"Thunder!" the captain exclaimed. "Cartaux! Sit down, my friend, sit down. I remember you very well. Excellent sergeant—always satisfactory. Well, well, well! in Algeria on business—or pleasure?"

"Both, I hope, Captain. I have come to reënlist."

"Reënlist?"

"Sure." Cartaux smiled, waved one hand casually. "Had my ups and downs outside, you know—did fairly well after a while. But one tires of civilian life, Captain. I guess the old saying has it right: 'Once a Legionnaire, always a Legionnaire!'"

CARBURETOR
YELLO-BOLE
New way of burning tobacco — better, cooler, cleaner. Carburetor-Action cools smoke. Keeps bottom of bowl absolutely dry. Caked with honey. At dealers' now.
$1.25
UPDRAFT LATEST DISCOVERY IN PIPES

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A Strange Place To Be

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Author of "Graveyard of the Gods," "Night on the Whangpoo," etc.

THERE wasn't even a mechanical piano. However, there was a gramophone which local sports occasionally fed with records, and there was a pingpong table, and a small billiards table. There were no electric lights, not even gas; a couple of benzine pressure lamps, looking like old-fashioned gas mantles, cast a half-hearted illumination, attracting mosquitoes by the millions and some wan, disconsolate moths driven indoors by the rains. For this was the middle of the rainy season. It was also the middle of the malaria belt, a haphazard, sun-scorched, fly-ridden aggregation of corrugated iron shacks, a nest of fever, amoebic dysentery, yaws, leprosy, and elephantiasis, with, from back in the bush, just to make things interesting, occasional dashes of beri-beri.

Kelsing sat alone with a glass of warm beer, a cardboard coaster over it to keep insects from falling in. He didn't particularly want the stuff, but it was early, and the night was still

Complete Novelet

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

much too hot to think of getting any sleep. So Kelsing sat and cursed his luck; and when the trouble started he was amazed and almost delighted.

There were perhaps eighteen men in the place, Frenchmen and half-castes and a one-eyed Tonkinese who scuttled here and there with drinks. There was also Madame, two-hundred-and fifty-odd pounds of watchfulness who sat aloof and apart continuously fanning herself. Some of the customers were drunk and they were all pretty noisy, but there had been nothing to suggest a fight. It was, when it happened, one of these breath-taking flare-ups for which nobody could possibly be prepared. Maybe the heat, as well as the whisky, had something to do with it.

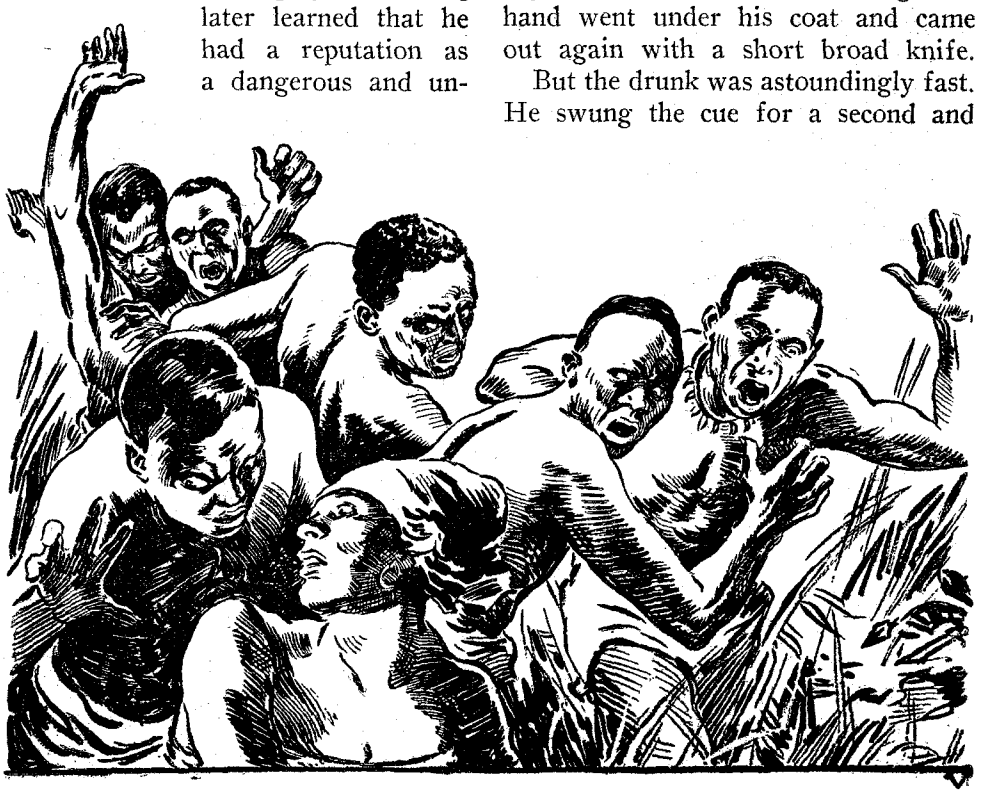
The billiards game was a miniature one, to fit the table, but the cues in use were full-sized. A player—Kelsing later learned that he had a reputation as a dangerous and unpredictable drunkard—reaching far back for a shot, struck with the heavy end of one of these cues a tall, thick, tattooed Frenchman at a nearby table. The seated man slapped the cue angrily aside, cursing the player's clumsiness and making him miss an easy shot. He didn't look up, he didn't even look around. He had the arrogance of undisputed strength, the arrogance of a man who could ordinarily do as much with his frown as most men would venture to do with their fists.

The effect upon the player was immediate and violent. He clubbed the cue, and turned, snarling. Kelsing half rose from his seat.

"Look out!" You could kill a man with one of those cues.

The first blow was awkwardly struck and glanced off the left shoulder of the giant, who rose, roaring like a wounded bull. The giant's hand went under his coat and came out again with a short broad knife.

But the drunk was astoundingly fast. He swung the cue for a second and



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

more accurate blow, balancing on his toes. He would certainly have landed that blow—if it hadn't been for Grant Kelsing.

KELSING did not have to move fast, only to think fast. He was immediately in back of the man with the cue. He reached up, grabbed that cue as it was started on its downward stroke. He jerked it, twisted it. Blathering, yammering like a lunatic, the player turned. Kelsing hit him neatly on the point of the chin, and he fell. Before anybody else in the place could move, Kelsing had hauled the man to his feet, had slapped him twice more in the chin while he held him there, and was dragging him toward the swinging doors. A moment later the man was lying flat on his face in the rain, moaning a little. Five minutes after that two bare-footed Melanesian cops in gaudy uniforms were carrying him away, and Madame was so excited and so pleased that she was actually tearing up the chit Kelsing had previously signed for his beer.

The assaulted giant, with his companion, came over to Kelsing's table.

"*Merci, monsieur.* You are English, eh?"

"American."

"*Ah, américain! Il vous remercie de tout mon coeur.* You save my life. You will perhaps have a drink with us, eh?"

"Well, I'll finish this one with you anyway."

If it came to that, they were both gigantic. Grant Kelsing, no little man, felt a dwarf beside the pair of them. The one he had saved was all French, bearded, with hard black teeth and hard dark blue eyes. He wore a dirty yachting cap, dirty ducks. There were small gold rings in his ears, and his arms were covered with tattooing. He smiled a lot, but it was an unpleasant, calculating smile. His name was Malraux.

His companion spoke much better English, and looked like an Englishman; he had a stiff yellow-gray mustache and stiff yellow-gray hair. He said his name was Jacques Ramel.

They were both older than Kelsing himself, men in their middle forties, but magnificently built, easy-moving, unafraid. Obviously they had been in many a barroom fight. Malraux, though his left shoulder must have been badly bruised, made no complaint, seemed even to forget the thing. He beamed upon Grant Kelsing. Ramel, on the other hand, though polite, was more watchful, less talkative.

Ramel asked, "What in the world does a young American happen to be doing in a hole like Port Vila, if I may ask?"

Kelsing sipped his beer, shrugged his shoulders. "I wanted to have a look at the South Seas—wanted to go places the tourists don't go. So I've been knocking around with one yacht or small schooner after another."

"Paying passenger?"

"No, working passenger. I'm not a member of any union, but I've handled boats, in Long Island Sound, and I can do my share. Came here two days ago in a trading schooner from Suva. She was due to go to Noumea, where I figured I wouldn't have any trouble picking up something else, but when they got here they decided they'd only go as far south as Erromango. I thought I'd better stop here if I expected to pick up a boat. Erromango's not much of a place, from all I hear."

"We came from Suva," Malraux cried. "Stopped there on our way from Papeete. You see our schooner out there off the Comptoirs Français dock?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, I saw her when she came in this morning. Looks like a sturdy little craft."

"Ah, she go anywhere, that boat! *C'est un rêve!*"

Ramel, who had been studying the American, said cautiously, "So you want to go to Noumea? Well, we're going down there ourselves, from here."

Malraux looked at his partner sharply, questioningly, and it seemed to Kelsing—though he could not be sure—that a kick was exchanged under the table. Then Malraux brightened.

"Why not come on to Noumea with us, *alors?*" asked Ramel. "We really need a third hand. We can handle it all right most of the time, but if the going got rough it might be different. No pay, of course. But it would be better than staying here."

"Anything," Grant Kelsing said with feeling, "would be better than staying here!"

THE third day, at about noon, they dropped anchor in the middle of a small, lovely, reef-protected bay, a bay all by itself, dominated but timorously by a small high island. The place was utterly quiet. There was no beach, no dock, and except for a glimpse of some sort of white house far up on the plateau which comprised most of the center of the island, it might never before have been visited by man. Surf thundered distantly but without malice upon the reef; where they anchored there was no disturbance except when a flying fish skittered across the surface of the water, creating a trail of tremulous catspaws before it plopped back into the bay.

"Plantation up there," Malraux said thoughtfully, and Kelsing saw that although the island was edged with jungle the top of the plateau itself, where the white house gleamed, was a mass of coconut trees. "Maybe we trade our sharks for some fruit, eh?"

They had caught two sharks that morning, four-footers, which lay in the after deck, not yet thoroughly dead, in everybody's way, and threatening to become a nuisance to the nostrils very soon. A basket of fresh oranges would be much more acceptable.

"Good idea," said Jacques Ramel. "The planter's sure to have coolie labor, whoever he is, and those boys are crazy about sharks. Suppose you climb up and make a dicker, Kelsing? He'll probably be delighted to see a fellow white man."

It was not that Kelsing minded the climb; on the contrary, the prospect of stretching his legs was a pleasant one. He had, however, a logical objection. "He'll probably be a Frenchman, and my French isn't much good."

"*Pas du tout.* Not at all," Ramel said heartily. "You speak like a native! *Venez.* I'll row you ashore in the tender. You won't have to lug the sharks up, of course. The planter'll be glad to send down coolies to do that."

Well, Kelsing was only a hand, and these men were joint owners of the forty-five foot *Tani,* so there was nothing for Kelsing to do. He thought it strange at the time. He was to understand, soon.

Yet he didn't sense danger. Not then! The little blue bay, hedged by the intensely green jungle, was far too lovely and quiet ever to suggest danger. Kelsing just thought it was odd, that was all. But he went.

There was no beach, and he was obliged to scramble ashore through a thicket of slimy-rooted mangroves and mahoes. Stepping out of the boat, he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lost his balance for an instant. Ramel grabbed his arm, righting him; but Ramel had been so rough about it that Kelsing's sun helmet toppled from his head into the water.

Ramel was all apologies as he rescued the helmet. "That's a shame! Clumsy of me! But you can't make a climb like that without a topee. Here—use mine. I'll be in the cabin for a while anyway so I shan't be needing it."

He clapped his own enormous helmet—the biggest Kelsing had ever seen—upon Kelsing's head.

"No, that's quite all right! Quite all right! Fits you perfectly. You may catch a bit of rain before you get back, but you couldn't hurt this old bonnet anyway. Well—cheero!"

Certainly the topee was no thing of beauty. It was huge, and very dirty. Heavy tropical rains had so pelted and soaked it that the red silk lining and the green felt of the underside of the brim had made their way smearingly up through the cork to the linen covering, so that what had once been white was mottled pink on top and a sickly green around the edges. It was a disgrace, that hat. But it would keep the sun off a man's head.

KELSING found a path readily enough. It twisted about for a time with seeming aimlessness, and the jungle was so thick that he could not see where he was going; then he came abruptly to the foot of a yellowish-white coral cliff.

The path continued, not too steep, not too narrow, and well defined, in a zigzag up the side of this cliff; but Kelsing did not ascend immediately.

The rain Jacques Ramel had predicted was already on its way—Kelsing could see it just beyond the reef, a slate-gray, fog-like mass approaching swiftly. He knew something about tropical rainstorms. This one wouldn't last long, but it would come up suddenly, and while it did last, would be terrific. There was even a chance that a man climbing that cliff path, without the protection of trees or shrubbery, might be beaten off the edge by the sheer force of the downfall. He didn't care to chance that. And there was no hurry—there never was any hurry about anything in these parts, he had learned. So he found himself a clump of plantain trees, additionally protected by a huge overhanging mango, and there he waited for the storm.

It came, as he had known it would, with breathtaking suddenness and ferocity. The daylight disappeared as though somebody had snapped out a light, and a hollow thin thunder started in the leaves high above Kelsing's head. Then the thunder came closer. Drops of rain smashed their way through. A fetid warmth, as though of steam not visible, rose from the places where they fell. Kelsing lighted a cigarette and managed to get three good puffs before the violence of the raindrops caught him. He was wetted, though not too seriously. He wasn't thinking about the rain anyway, as he stood there with his hands in his pockets, staring at nothing. He was thinking about the cruise of the *Tani* of Papeete.

There had been something funny about it from the very beginning. Malraux and Ramel, particularly Ramel, had been a shade too eager to get this third hand—a third hand they didn't really need at all, as Kelsing soon decided, for they were both excellent sailors and the *Tani* was shipshape and seaworthy in every respect. They had a funny way of looking at him. Malraux, in particular, was always staring

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at him as though through the bars of a cage, as though at some sort of biological specimen rather than at a man. The bearded Frenchman, caught at this, invariably would break into one of his broad unpleasant smiles, showing his blackened teeth; but Kelsing was not reassured.

Jacques Ramel, though he behaved more carefully, was somehow even more disturbing. He looked and acted as though once he had been far above this business of sailing a schooner. In the old-fashioned phrase, he had once been a gentleman. What his education amounted to it was impossible for Kelsing to estimate; but his manners, when he wished them to be, were impeccable. He knew his world of men. Nevertheless there was something rotten about Jacques Ramel—something decadent, decayed. It was suspicious, too, that he insisted he was a Frenchman—he with his blond-gray hair worn stiff and short in the Prussian style, and his toothbrush mustache, and most of all his south British accent. Grant Kelsing didn't like him and didn't trust him.

Another thing that was strange—why had they turned north once they cleared Vila harbor, instead of south in the direction of Noumea? Malraux and Ramel, protesting that they meant indeed to go to Noumea, had explained that they wished to pick up a small shipment of copra somewhere in Ambrym, just a tiny shipment, as a favor to an old friend. It would only delay them a few days. Yet this explanation sounded fishy.

THEN there had been the business of the sea chest, which had happened the previous day. The chest was under Malraux's bunk in the tiny cabin the three of them shared, and Kelsing had never seen it opened or even touched. The owners were on deck, Kelsing was below straightening some things in his bag. A circular belt buckle without a belt, a souvenir from some forgotten island, popped out and annoyingly, perversely, rolled under Malraux's bunk, behind the chest. Kelsing stooped, cursing. Then he got to his knees, and thinking of innumerable not-very-funny jokes about collar buttons rolling under beds, he began to fumble with his hands.

He did not hear Malraux approach. The first thing he knew of the Frenchman's appearance was when a hand descended upon each of his shoulders and he was hauled to his feet as though he had been a sack of coffee. Malraux was shouting something in French, and his face was twisted with fury, his little dark blue eyes were hot with rage. Kelsing, gasping, broke one shoulder loose.

The space in which they struggled was not large—cabins in 45-foot cruisers never are—and when Malraux went for the knife it sucked Kelsing's breath out. For Kelsing had no possible weapon. And Malraux, for a reason unknown by the working passenger, was a madman; it was in his eyes, his taut, bared lips.

It was Ramel's voice which saved Kelsing. Ramel, always a shade the superior of his companion in any pinch, possibly because of his greater intelligence, sensed from the deck that something was wrong below, and he spoke sharply, loudly.

"What's the trouble down there?"

It straightened Malraux, sobered him, though he still held the knife and still glared at Kelsing.

Ramel, getting no answer, took a chance and left the wheel—they were sailing before the wind in a quiet sea

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—and hastened below. His small gray eyes moved back and forth swiftly. Then he stepped forward, took the knife out of his friend's hand and started to speak rapidly in French. Kelsing could only catch a few words here and there. He gathered that both men were using many Polynesian words as well.

The affair was settled almost as suddenly as it had started. Raymond Malraux apologized with profusion and embarrassment. He must have been dazed by the sun on the deck, he explained; he must have been a little giddy. Once he had lost a valuable crucifix as well as several valued photographs at the hands of a thief who came aboard the *Tani* while in port, and recently he had been thinking about that crucifix and those photographs. Coming down into the dim cabin after the dizzying glare of the deck, and seeing Kelsing kneeling before the sea chest and apparently fumbling with its lock, had driven him wild. He had not realized, until he heard his friend's voice, what it was he was doing. He hoped that Kelsing would forgive him.

All this was offered in Malraux's best English and with apparent sincerity. What was Kelsing to do? He shrugged, he even managed to smile, and he said of course it was all right, forget it. They shook hands.

But all the time Kelsing, who had never thought of it before, could not help wondering what was in that sea chest.

HE was remembering these things now as he waited at the foot of the cliff for the rain to stop. He pulled absently at a wet cigarette and stared at the black earth between his feet and wondered what was going to come to him this trip.

Presently the rain ceased, as abruptly as though turned off by one twist of a celestial spigot. The thunder above was no more. In its stead there came a sad irregular dripping as drops baffled by the leaves of the mango and plantain were finding a more leisurely route to the jungle earth. The earth itself seemed to exhale, as though sighing in gladness because the beating was past. Things lifted themselves. It became very hot. And it was light again, for the sun had reappeared.

Grant Kelsing wiped his face, replaced Ramel's monstrous topee, and started up the cliff path. A minute earlier a furious torrent of chocolate brown water had been hissing and searing its way down this path, but now the path was clear and not even a rivulet showed. The stones were loose and sometimes slid away under Kelsing's feet, but for the most part the path was wide and not steep and the going was easy.

When he reached the top, the edge of the plateau, he saw that the white building visible from the *Tani* was not in fact a plantation house, but a *kiosque,* octagonal in shape, with two doors, and jalousied on all sides. This *kiosque,* not in the least like those of Paris, is a characteristic piece of architecture in the New Hebrides where servants are cheap and breezes treasured. It is in fact an outside, detached dining room in which the master of the house and his family and guests can eat, far from the smells of the kitchen, the heat of the main house itself, the noise of the coolie quarters. With wide jalousies on all sides, virtually open to the air, it usually contains no more than a table and a few chairs, possibly a sideboard.

This particular *kiosque,* which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seemed deserted, was on Kelsing's left as he reached the top of the cliff, and he glanced toward it, casually at first, then more sharply. *Was* it deserted? Had he not heard something move around in there? But this was foolishness! Because of the open blinds he could see practically all of the inside of the *kiosque* and if anybody were in there he must be on hands and knees. Kelsing did not stop to investigate. He was much more interested in the plantation house itself, which was perhaps seventy-five yards away.

There was a small garden, even some attempt at a lawn, and on the veranda—a small one but new—were several comfortable wicker chairs, one of them rocking gently in the breeze. There was nobody in sight.

There was nobody in sight; yet Grant Kelsing had the curious conviction that he was being watched. He felt this the instant he came into sight of the plantation house.

Behind that house was a large and well kept compound, huts for the coolies, copra storage sheds, an open drying platform for copra when the rains were not on, a smoke shed, a sacking shed. Smoke curled from several of the outside stoves among the coolie houses, but there was nobody in sight. Not even a dog to bark, a chicken to cluck stupidly.

Beyond the compound were coconut trees, a forest of them, sweeping away toward the blue ocean the other side of the island, clearly visible. They lifted and tossed their fronds indifferently, and the breeze played across the tops of them as you have seen breezes ruffle a field of winter wheat. Further away, nearer the shore, and on right and left at some distance, were patches of jungle either half cleared or not cleared at all. There was plenty of evidence of human labor here. Somebody was bravely attempting to clear the whole island of jungle and to plant it with coconut.

GRANT KELSING started slowly toward the house. He was uneasy. Photographed, this scene would have been one of vast tranquillity. Seen, it was something different. There was a tenseness, a strained pause, a waiting in the air as Kelsing started forward. He had a hunch that something was going to happen very soon.

Something did.

The parti-colored sun helmet left Kelsing's head as though jerked off from behind, and he heard a sound like a whip crack. There was no smoke; he saw no gun; but he knew what had happened. Somebody in one of those seemingly blank windows had taken a shot at him—and had missed by rather less than an inch.

He wheeled about, threw himself on the ground, wriggled to the nearer door of the *kiosque,* scrambled inside. On the floor, panting, he waited.

Then there came a voice behind him, from directly behind, inside the *kiosque* with him, and it said, in French:

"If you move, Monsieur, I will blow you to pieces."

Very slowly he turned his head. The girl was not eight feet away, a double-barreled shotgun in her hands. The two muzzles faced Kelsing. The two hammers were cocked.

The girl was not more than eighteen or nineteen, a brunette, slim and straight, strikingly beautiful. She wore white linen, fresh and smart as any mannequin at Longchamps. But her features were not those of a mannequin. Her mouth, very small, twitched a bit, and her forefinger on the nearer of the two triggers was not altogether

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

motionless; but her eyes blazed with determination, her tiny nostrils were drawn tight and firm, there was that in her pretty chin which said she meant business.

Grant Kelsing stared for a long time. Then he said quietly, "I would rather you spoke English. I don't understand French very well. Do you speak English?"

"Of course I speak English. My mother was an American."

"Ah," said Kelsing.

"Why do you say 'ah'?"

"I don't really know. Why do you point that pair of cannons at me? It wouldn't take much to set them off."

"I know that. Why should I not set them off, as you express it? You have come here to kill my father!"

"I never saw your father," Kelsing said. "I don't know who he is, or who you are."

"It is true," said a voice from the doorway. "This man has never seen me. At least, I have never seem him, I am sure."

The planter entered very quietly, coming from the direction of the house. You would have known him immediately for this girl's father. His mouth was small and firm like hers, his eyes dark, fine, alert. He showed no fear or anger. In each hand he held one of the longest pistols Grant Kelsing had ever seen—heavy pistols but thin, flat, exquisitely polished, with smooth Circassian walnut stocks inlaid with ivory. One, the one in his left hand, smelled even then of gunpowder. The planter did not point either of these weapons at Kelsing, but this threat was not necessary. You knew from the way he held them, from a glance at his firm proud eyes, that this man could and would shoot to kill.

II

"I DID not know you had come here, *chérie,*" the planter said gently to his daughter. "I thought you had gone back behind that hibiscus hedge. You would be safer there. I do not believe they know that you are here on the island."

"Should I go in hiding when you are in danger?" she asked.

Grant Kelsing said, "I still don't know what this is all about, but offhand, judging from the way the young lady's holding that shotgun, I wouldn't say that she was in danger of anything so much as becoming a murderer. I do wish you'd put it down," he said to her. "It makes me nervous. It would make *anybody* nervous."

She smiled, and it seemed to Kelsing that she was admiring him a little. But promptly her eyes became hard again. She lowered the shotgun, stood it against the wall, and pushed both triggers.

"There was never anything in it," she confessed. "We're out of shells."

Kelsing sighed and leaned back against the wall. He felt a great deal better. The planter held the two long matched pistols negligently as he stared out between the jalousies toward the head of the path up which Kelsing had come.

"I could have killed you, and almost did," he confessed unemotionally. "I thought at first you were Jacques Ramel. That's Ramel's topee. I couldn't fail to recognize it."

"Ramel's a taller man than I am."

"True, *monsieur,* but you are not short yourself. Your shoulders are as broad as his. And when you first came over the top of the cliff path you were leaning low with the effort of climbing, which made me uncertain about your

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

height. So I waited an instant. I am glad I did. When you straightened I saw that you were not Ramel, though you wore his topee and though that's the *Tani* below in the bay, *n'est-ce pas?"*

"Yes, that's the *Tani.*"

"I couldn't possibly mistake that stay-sail and that long boom. Very few stay-sail schooners in these parts. Where is Ramel, then? And where is Raymond Malraux?"

"In the schooner, as far as I know. Ramel rowed me ashore."

"What did he tell you to do?"

"Come up here and ask the planter, whoever he might be, if he'd care to exchange some fresh fruit for a couple of sharks."

"Did he tell you who I am?"

"No. I don't know that even yet."

The planter ignored this. He had been staring out between the jalousies like a man who expects something. Now another downpour of rain came, suddenly, tumultuously, and he turned away, satisfied apparently that nobody would try to ascend the path for a time. He walked to the center of the room, laid one pistol on the table, opened the other, took a large cartridge from his coat pocket, inserted the cartridge directly into the barrel of the pistol. These were, Kelsing now noticed, duelling pistols—French duelling pistols—long, lean, utterly accurate, heavy-calibered, single-shot weapons. The planter clamped his pistol shut, picked up the other.

"If you are telling me the truth, *monsieur,"* he said, "I owe you an apology for shooting your hat off."

"Did you do it with one of those," Kelsing could not help asking, "at that distance?"

"Yes."

"You're a fine marksman!"

The planter smiled for the first time, but it was a brief smile, almost an absent-minded one. "Yes," he murmured, "and Ramel and Malraux know that. Perhaps that is why they sent you up first. As an innocent decoy, *hein?* Tell me about it, *monsieur.* Mind you! I do not agree to believe what you say! My daughter's life and my own are at stake, and I am bound to be skeptical. But tell me about it."

THE rain had ceased, and with its stopping he had returned to the side of the *kiosque* nearest the top of the path and was again staring out. The pistols hung at his side.

Grant Kelsing told his story swiftly and without waste of words. The planter did not stir, did not at any instant take his gaze from the top of the path. Afterward he said slowly:

"I believe you, *monsieur,* and I am sincerely sorry that I shot your hat off. But it was not a time for the asking of questions. Usually"—he smiled a little—"usually we are not so inhospitable when a white man visits us. But Raymond Malraux and Jacques Ramel are not white men. They are devils!"

"If you really expect them to storm this place," Kelsing suggested, "wouldn't it be better to get out some other weapons than two single-shot pistols?"

"Hélas! we have no others! As Thérèse told you, we are out of shells for the shotgun. I gave her that just in the hope that she might frighten somebody with it in an emergency. And my rifle dropped over the cliff only the other day, in a slight accident. It was hopelessly smashed."

"Where are the others? Surely you and your daughter aren't the only persons on the island?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Except the natives, yes. I sent the natives out into the jungle on the far side as soon as the *Tani* appeared. They are ignorant fellows, without arms, and after all it is not *their* fight."

"But why," Kelsing asked with growing exasperation, "should Ramel and Malraux want to kill you? They don't look like a very pleasant pair of customers, but after all men don't go around assassinating strangers simply for the fun of it."

"I am no stranger to them," the planter said sadly. "They picked you up because you are an American and alone. I am not sure, but I suspect that they were not quite certain which island my plantation was on. There is another planter, alone on another island a little north of this, and his name is likewise Carot, though we are not relations. Doubtless they inquired in passing here on their way from Papeete to Port Vila, and doubtless they heard about both of us. They would not dare to make too close an inquiry, for that would be remembered afterward when I had been found murdered. So they needed a decoy to go ahead of them. If the wrong planter was up here, nothing would happen to you and they would not be seen. Then they could go to the other island and find me, and kill me."

"*I* would have seen them! *I* could have identified them!"

"I see that you do not truly know this pair, *monsieur*. You would not be considered. You would be murdered also, when you had played your innocent part, and your body would be weighted and dumped overboard. Then they could change their course for Noumea, keeping out of the way of other vessels. They had cleared for Noumea in the first place. They could explain the long while they took in getting there by contrary winds—the *Tani* has no auxiliary—or by miscalculation in the course, or by both.

"Your absence they could explain too. You had fallen overboard one night when you were alone on watch. They had missed you, put back, looked for hours in vain. This too would help account for the long time it took them to get from Vila to Noumea. The authorities might be skeptical; they *would* be skeptical, knowing the reputations of these two scoundrels; but what could they prove? The real evidence, your body, would be at the bottom of the Pacific."

"The natives! Suppose some of the natives saw them, or saw the ship—"

"I think they have taken that into account also. No doubt they remember that old saying about dead men telling no tales."

"But they couldn't slaughter a whole—"

"You do not know these two as I know them, *monsieur*."

The girl, very frightened, her eyes very wide, was back against a wall. Her hands were over her mouth. She was staring at her father. Kelsing, too, stared at Carot, the planter who spoke in a low even voice, never relaxing his watch on the path.

"But why," Kelsing cried again, "should Ramel and Malraux want to kill you?"

"That is a long story, *monsieur*." The planter sighed a little. "But it is a story you are in decency entitled to hear, since I fired upon you without warning. Thérèse, you, too, are entitled to hear it, so that you will know what these men are like and how you should act when they come up the cliff here—as I am sure they will do.

"I had started to explain this to my daughter, *monsieur*," he went on,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"when first I sighted the *Tani.* But there was not time to finish it. So I will tell it now."

RAIN was falling again, but it was not a heavy rain, and Carot did not move from his position of watchfulness. He was obliged to raise his voice in order that they could hear him.

"About four months ago, before you, Thérèse *ma chérie,* had come out here from France, I had an opportunity to turn over this plantation to a friend for a few weeks. I am the only white man here, *vous comprenez, monsieur,* and it is not often I get a chance to leave. There was not time for a visit to France, or to the United States, where also I have many friends, but there was time to go to Tahiti, where I managed a plantation before I bought this one. A friend took me to Vila in a small schooner, and there I bought a return ticket to Papeete on the Messagéries Maritimes. I had only a few weeks in Tahiti, which is always too short in that place. A lifetime would be too short a while to spend in Tahiti, *monsieur.* Have you visited it?"

"Yes, and I agree with you."

"Ah, yes! Well, I had only a few weeks, and I called on this old friend and that, and the last one on my list was the trader Hennessy, part Irish and part Polynesian and the only half caste on a small island about half a day's sail from Papeete. It is a lonely place and not many schooners stop there, none regularly. I was obliged to charter one. I chartered the *Tani.*

"I should have known better. I was warned that nobody was safe with a precious pair like Jacques Ramel and Raymond Malraux, and indeed I knew of their reputation from my previous stay in Tahiti. But I was happy, and I scoffed at warnings. We went to visit my friend Hennessy in this lonely island. Besides Ramel and Malraux and myself there was a native hand, a young Solomon Islander, a good sailor but deathly afraid of his employers. He was afraid even to run away from them, that boy. He was virtually their slave.

"Hennessy was charming, as always. He knew about these rascals and did not like them, but because I was with them he insisted that we all stop at his house for the few days we were to spend there. He even invited the Solomon Islander, but Malraux and Ramel decreed that this lad should remain aboard the *Tani,* which was anchored a couple of hundred yards off the beach.

"Now surely there seemed to be no cause for worry here. I myself had practically no money with me—I had been prudent enough to leave most of my cash in Papeete at the Banque de l'Indo-Chine—and Hennessy, poor fellow, had never made a cent out of his trading, for he was much too good natured to be successful. It would seem that there was nothing for Ramel and Malraux to do but enjoy themselves. Which they did.

"Hennessy, I said, was poor, notoriously poor. But on the second afternoon, as he and I were taking a walk along his little beach there, his own piece of property, I saw and pounced upon something which took the breath out of me. Have you ever heard of ambergris, *chérie—monsieur?*"

The girl nodded slowly. She did not try to say anything. Kelsing said, "Ambergris . . . I've *heard* of it, yes. I've never seen a piece."

"Few men have," said Carot. "It is one of the rarest substances on earth. And the curious thing about it is its origin. A whale is sick, you compre-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hend? A whale is sick, and it throws off this nasty spongy substance, which floats. Sometimes it floats for many miles, many hundreds of miles. Sometimes it washes ashore somewhere, but even when it does it is not always found. A friend of mine in Paris, a chemist employed by a big perfumery company, once told me about it and showed me samples. For it is invaluable to fine perfumery makers. A little goes a long way with them—but then, very little is ever found.

"At first, as my friend explained to me, ambergris is like a large jellyfish, mostly dark purple in color. If it is washed ashore and remains unfound for a long time, and particularly if it remains exposed to a tropical sun, it shrivels considerably and stiffens and becomes eventually a faintly yellowish white. It looks like a particularly fine piece of coral, perhaps the size of your fist. This is by far the most valuable kind of ambergris, for the sun, through forgotten years, has performed some chemical change in it which makes it so. It has no regular market value, for there is too little of it found to justify this. But the white sort is worth, always, hundreds of thousands of francs an ounce. A piece the size of your fist, *monsieur,* would make you a very rich man."

"And you found one of these?" Kelsing asked.

"I pounced upon it! I raised it, shouting with joy. 'Coral,' snorted my friend Hennessy, and 'Coral' said the owners of the *Tani* who had come up from behind us. 'No, no!' I cried. 'Not coral, but ambergris! I have seen it before, and I know! Hennessy, *mon vieux,* you are wealthy!' Bewildered, he pointed out that *I* had found the thing. 'But on your property,' I replied. 'So it is yours. You are rich, *mon ami!*'

"WE took it into his little house. We made him bring out wine, and we toasted him as a millionaire, laughing at him, congratulating him on his extraordinary luck. Ramel and Malraux seemed every bit as excited and every bit as happy about the discovery as I was myself. They cheered and laughed and sang.

"We agreed that Hennessy should sail back to Papeete with us the following morning. There was a man in Papeete, a Doctor D'Entrecasteaux, who was an acknowledged expert in these matters and would be able to identify the stuff for us without question. He would know, too, with what French and American firms my friend Hennessy should get in touch in order to get the most for this lucky find. We would start first thing in the morning.

"Just before the party broke up, Hennessy took me to one side and pressed the piece of what looked like coral into my hands. He insisted that it was mine. I laughed and told him that it was his by right. But he was a little drunk and very persistent, and I was tired, so at last, still laughing, I consented to take it for the night. It was simply to keep him quiet, *comprenez-vous?* Before I went to bed I thrust the thing under my pillow.

"Possibly this was the reason for my tossing. I should have slept well that night. I do ordinarily, and especially after I have had much wine. But possibly the thing under my pillow had its own peculiar effect on me that night and kept me awake. This was why I happened to hear the sound in Hennessy's room.

"It wasn't a loud sound and there was nothing notably strange about it—a sort of gurgle, I'd describe it. There was, really, no reason why I should take alarm. But I did. For a time I

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lay there, calling myself a fool, listening for further sounds and hearing none. But I was not able to go to sleep.

"You remember, *monsieur,* how when you were a boy and were frightened by shadows in the room where you slept, those shadows became nothing when finally you summoned your courage and went to them and touched them? Your hand went through them, and thereafter to you they were only shadows, nothing more, not bears or robbers, as once in spite of yourself you had believed.

"Well, I thought to do the same thing this night in Hennessy's house. I couldn't sleep, my imagination was troubling me because of a silly chance sound I had heard or thought I'd heard, and the only thing to do about it, I decided, was go and have a look. I didn't expect to find anything wrong. I was simply pampering an overheated imagination. I called it childishness, but I *did* want sleep. So I got out of bed and went to Hennessy's room across the hall.

"There was moonlight streaming through the windows. The mosquito netting over the bed had been torn down. This was the first thing I noticed.

"You know, *monsieur,* that in these parts we do not use much furniture. Nor do we have large wardrobes, most of us. In Hennessy's bedroom, besides the bed itself, were only two straight-back chairs, a small table without any drawer, and a clothes closet, nothing else. There was not even a rug.

"The closet door was open, and Hennessy's clothes were scattered on the floor. But still this did not disturb me so much as the somehow alarming fact that the mosquito netting was not canopied over the bed.

"More than the netting had been violated in that bed, I soon saw. The pillows had been hauled this way and that, and slashed with sharp knives. The sheets had been ripped off. Hennessy himself lay on his back, in the midst of this ruin, and his throat was cut from ear to ear. There was a lot of blood. More blood than I had ever seen before—and I served in the war, *monsieur.*"

CAROT the planter shook his head, wiped his face. For the first time his voice was edged with emotion. But he never took his gaze from the head of the cliff path.

"Now comes the part of which I am not proud. But you must understand that I had my daughter to think of, that I could no longer help my friend Hennessy, who was most emphatically dead, and that I was unarmed and dealing with two rascals, either one of whom was powerful enough to break my neck with his bare hands.

"I went back to my own bedroom. I did not lock the door, didn't think of it, and for that matter I don't suppose there was a key in it. Possibly there was not even a lock.

"I took the thing I had found from under my pillow and stood there holding it, trembling a little. Yes, I trembled, I admit it. Then I heard the footsteps in the hall.

"The footsteps of two heavy men. Very faint, a mere scuffle. But in that utter silence there would be no mistaking it. They were approaching my room, Ramel and Malraux. They had killed Hennessy in his sleep and had searched his room. They had gone to the front to search the shop on the chance that he might have left the ambergris there. And now, still with-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out it, they were about to try the only other possibility—me.

"*Chérie—monsieur,* I am not ashamed to say it, I jumped out of the window. What reason was there for me to stay and be cut down like a cornered beast? I have fought in my time and I am ready to fight again. My croix de guerre, *monsieur,* as my daughter can tell you, has three palms on it, and I have been cited for gallantry many times. Nor have I fought only in the war! These pistols you see me holding have been used by me in the field of honor on more than one occasion.

He was most anxious that this fact should be understood. His face was wet with perspiration, but his hands and features were steady. Kelsing nodded a little, instinctively, though of course the planter did not see this.

"I went out the window, making no sound. My thought was that I would see that my friend was avenged in the manner provided by law. Indeed, it was the only way I could be sure of it! I ran to where the tender was beached. I pushed out alone. I rowed. All the rest of that night I rowed, and several hours of the next morning, until at last I came to Tahiti. Not to Papeete, I was still far from there, but I walked to a village where there was a motorcar and I had myself driven to the city.

"I was exhausted by furious rowing, and yet in that time I had had a chance to think. I thought: Ramel and Malraux will know what has happened to me, and they will take advantage of this to throw upon me all the blame for Hennessy's murder. They were scoundrels and known as such, but there were three of them—for though the Solomon Islander had been aboard the *Tani* I was sure they would make him back whatever story they told. *I* would be the murderer!

"THE Messagéries Maritimes vessel I was to have caught was in dock, and it sailed that night for Suva and Port Vila, and I sailed with it. I did not go to the authorities.

"This was perhaps foolish of me. I realize that now. But I had a daughter to think of. You *chérie,* were on your way to Port Vila by the Dutch ship, knowing of no trouble, coming to these parts for the first time after your schooling in France. I had also my friend on this plantation to think of. If I did not arrive in time he would miss his own leave, and he had looked forward to that for five years. You know that there is only one ship every six weeks from Tahiti to these parts. I could not afford to miss it, I thought. And I did not. Having run away so far, I ran farther."

Carot wiped his face with his sleeve, the long pistols dangling from his little pale hands. He sighed.

"All this happened three months ago. Here we get very little news, of course, only what is brought by occasional trading schooners. I heard faraway echoes of Hennessy's murder, but I heard too that nobody had been arrested. And I began to understand.

"Malraux and Ramel, like me, had hurried away. But they had not reported the killing. They had not set the gendarmes on my track as I had expected them to do. Somehow they had managed to clear themselves of suspicion—how this was done I do not know, but they are a clever pair, those two, and they know those parts. Then what would they do? If I were arrested the piece of stuff from Hennessy's beach would be confiscated as evidence. *This* was what they wanted,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

not my arrest, not even my execution! They believed I had it. They had good reason to believe this. They would come after me and get it.

"And this is why, *chérie* and *monsieur,* this is why when I saw the *Tani* drop anchor here this morning I sent the coolies back into the jungle and sent you, *chérie,* to another part of the jungle—where you did not go. And this is why, *monsieur,* when I saw you come up the path with Ramel's topee on your head, I fired at it."

There was a considerable silence. The sun was out again, blasting through the opening of the jalousies, laying bars of furious white-yellow upon the floor. Discouraged drops left over from the latest downpour dripped off the eaves. The bay below, with the little schooner in the center of it, was peaceful and incredibly beautiful.

Kelsing muttered, "And all because a whale was sick."

"Ah, there, *monsieur,* is the strangest part of it. The whale was *not* sick! Though I did not go to the gendarmes in those last few hours in Papeete before the M.M. ship sailed, I did risk a visit to Dr. D'Entrecasteaux, and I showed him the thing I had found. He is an authority; but I could not bring myself to believe him when he laughed and told me I knew far less about ambergris than I'd supposed. I could not believe this. I mailed the thing back to my friend in Paris, who surely would not lie to me. Only the other day, when a native sailed over from Ambrym with mail, did I receive his answer. Well, Dr. D'Entrecasteaux had been right. The thing I had picked up was nothing but coral. An exceptional bit of coral worth perhaps fifty centimes in a souvenir shop."

The girl cried, "Could you not tell the men this?"

"I could have told them," Carot said sadly, "but they would not have believed me. They would think it a trick. They would torture me in an effort to get what they supposed the truth. And eventually they would kill me to shut my mouth. This is why they have come today."

She started toward him, tottering a little, her arms extended. He seemed to feel her approach, though he did not turn. He lifted one hand in signal for her to stay back.

"There may be shooting at any moment," he explained quietly, apologetically. "They will certainly come this way. It is the only way they can get up here without walking half around the island and approaching from the other side of the house."

"Suppose they do that?" Kelsing asked quickly. "They've had time. Wouldn't it be a good idea if I went back there and—"

Both doors of the *kiosque* were open. One was near the head of the path, though it did not actually face this. The other, opposite, faced the house, and it was through this the shots came.

They came a ripping, tearing sound, not notably loud but nasty, persistent, mechanically spaced and very fast. There were many. It would not have been possible to count them.

Carot's legs went out from under him and he fell upon his face, half turning. He made no outcry, he never had a chance. One of the pistols, knocked from his hand by the force of the fall, skithered across the floor.

The girl tried to scream, and couldn't. Grant Kelsing, with no time to be polite, whirled around and struck her with the back of his left arm. She fell through the other door, and Kelsing closed it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

RAYMOND MALRAUX stood in the doorway. He had come from around the house. There was a submachine gun cradled in his right arm, and a wisp of blue-gray smoke hung, startled, at its muzzle.

The submachine gun was pointed low. Malraux, shooting through the doorway at some distance, had purposely held it that way. He had fired only at the planter's legs, breaking both of them in many places.

It happened very quickly. Carot tried to raise himself on one elbow. It is possible that he was not even conscious as he did so but was acting only on blind physical instinct. It is almost certain that he could not see, could not aim properly, even if he intended to shoot. But Raymond Malraux did not stop to reason this out. Malraux squeezed his right hand, and the sub-machine gun sputtered again. After that Carot was motionless. It seemed a long moment before the blood began to appear in a dozen places about his head and body. Malraux looked at Kelsing. Killer though he was, Malraux was excited. He swung the barrel of the gun in Kelsing's direction.

Jacques Ramel appeared behind him, grabbed his shoulder, hauled him back, cursing. Ramel cursed in French, rapidly, explosively, and though Kelsing could not make out the words themselves the meaning was clear enough. Ramel was wild with anger because of that second volley. They had wanted this man alive, for the present! *Alive* not *dead!* But only a glance was needed to tell them that Carot was dead. No physician's certificate was necessary, no examination.

Ramel looked at Kelsing, who did not move. Kelsing had two swift thoughts. One: now I know what was in that sea chest; and the other: I still have a chance if they haven't seen the girl.

"Him, too," Malraux growled, and lifted the gun.

"*Wait,* you fool!"

Then Ramel said slowly to Grant Kelsing, "Your life depends on how you answer this, American. Did this man tell you what we want here?"

Very quietly Kelsing replied, "Yes, he said you were after the ambergris."

"Ah! And did he tell you where it was hidden?"

"Yes," said Kelsing.

There was no sound from beyond the door Kelsing had closed. Thérèse Carot presumably was lying on the ground out there, not more than a few feet from the spot where Kelsing stood. Had she fainted? Had the fall stunned her, and would she moan or scream when she recovered consciousness? Or did she understand that her one chance lay in silence? At least, neither of the Frenchmen seemed to be aware of her existence. They could not have seen her as they approached the *kiosque,* they could not have seen that Kelsing pushed something outside and then shut the door after it.

"Ah," said Ramel softly.

HE stooped beside the hideously riddled body of the planter and took from the right hand the pistol it held. He did this very quietly, thoughtfully. But when he straightened he moved with extraordinary speed.

The attack caught Kelsing unprepared. He had not known just what to expect, but certainly not this. He saw Ramel spring toward him, saw the clubbed pistol in Ramel's hand. He started to raise his own arms to cover his head, but he was not quick enough.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Something went puffily, blackly. *Boom!* —a hollow, faraway sound. Then through the blackness, languid streamers of crimson floated downward. The streamers curled, began to twist back upon themselves. The black settled, thinned, became grayish.

Though he was unable to struggle at the time, Kelsing was aware of the fact that they were tying him hand and foot. He thought for a while that they were choking him. Something, certainly, was pressing against his throat. Veils of gray slid past his eyes. He blinked, and found that he could see.

However, this was not a great advantage for what he could see was no more than one of Ramel's feet and a portion of wall beyond. He was lying on his side, the floor pressing his left cheek. His hands were tied in front of him. His legs were tied behind, tied together at the ankles and then pulled far back toward his head. The rope that tied his ankles—strong slim rope they must have brought to tie Carot with before torturing him—was passed once around his neck from behind.

When he moved any part of his body in any way, the effect was to tighten the rope around his neck, already so tight that it made spots swim before his eyes. He was as helpless as a trussed pig.

Ramel's voice came. "He told you where it was hidden. Well—*where?*"

It was half a minute before Kelsing could reply. The words felt as though they were fired from a cannon in his chest and obliged to tear their white-hot way up past the cramped muscles of his throat. His ears were ringing. His mouth was appallingly dry. "Buried . . . Buried it."

"All right. Where?"

"Didn't see it myself. He told me —in case you killed him . . . Back of the house, straight back. One of the first coco palms has a mark shoulder-high."

"Carot's shoulder, I suppose?"

Kelsing did not answer this directly. He gasped on, struggling to disgorge those painful words. "Star-shaped mark, he said. Ten feet beyond that, straight line toward ocean. . . ."

"And dig?"

"And dig," gasped Kelsing.

ONE of them might have stayed there while the other went out to confirm this statement, but they were too eager to get their treasure to think of it. Also they had much to do. It was not well that they should linger too long on this island.

Malraux, probably still hot with the brute urge to kill, lowered the submachine gun and placed its muzzle against the side of Kelsing's neck. Kelsing could feel the thing there. He could not see it.

"Maintenant?" asked Malraux.

"No, no, you fool! Not now! Suppose he's lied to us? We've got to keep him this way until we make sure. You start to work on those coolies and I'll do the digging."

They went; and Kelsing waited for what seemd a very long while, hour-long minutes packed with agony while he struggled to breathe. He heard a soft step. A sob. Then someone's hands were busy with the rope that bound his ankles, and though the hands tried to be gentle the strain on Kelsing's neck was such that he must have lost consciousness for a moment or two. His head was banging furiously from excess of blood. His ears rang.

Now the rope around his neck was gone, and the hands were busy upon the other rope binding his wrists.

"Oh, mon pére! Mon pére!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He whispered, when he was able to whisper at all, "You had better not look at him, *mademoiselle*. Try not to look at him."

He sat up, toppled sideward, sat up again, grimacing in pain. Somehow he got to his feet. He led the silently sobbing girl outside.

"Wait here," he whispered. "It will do no good for you to look at him. There is nothing you can do to help him, now." He squeezed her shoulders a little, shook her gently, made sure that she could stand. "Wait here. I will be right back, *mademoiselle.*"

He returned to the *kiosque,* closing the door behind him. The pistol which had fallen from Carot's hand still lay on the floor, unnoticed by the invaders. Kelsing opened it, found it loaded. Grimly, gritting his teeth, he turned to the red mass that had a few minutes earlier been the planter of this island—a mass around which already the flies were busy. Swallowing hard, forcing himself to fight back sickness, he knelt beside it and reached into the coat pocket from which he had seen Carot draw a cartridge. The pocket was empty.

It was hard, one of the hardest things he had ever done, but he made himself search every other pocket of that bloodied heap. He found no cartridges.

Outside, the girl had not stirred. He took her gently by the shoulders, pointed to the cliff path in front of them.

"Come. We've got to move fast. The tender must be somewhere ashore down there, or even if it isn't we can swim. I know the *tani* well. I can sail her alone, and we'll be out of this place in twenty minutes on a breeze like this. Come on. Hurry."

She opened her eyes and saw the boat below. She did not seem to see anything else. Like a sleepwalker, Kelsing helping her, she took a step or two forward. From the other side of the house came a spatter of machine-gun fire, a shrill confused screaming, another burst of machine-gun fire, then silence again.

THE girl shook her head. "No!" She had not moved her lips to say it, but the word was round and unmistakable.

"Come on," Kelsing whispered urgently. "We've got no time to waste. We can make Ambrym."

"No," she said again.

Hysterical, he thought. And no wonder! He stood to lift her, thinking to carry her down the path. If the tender wasn't to be found he could somehow swim out to the *Tani* himself. She was not heavy.

"No, no," she said hastily, her voice a little louder now. She stepped away from him. "No, it is not that. I am not mad. It is not what you think."

"But we've got to go! We've got to get out to that boat!"

She jerked her head a little, moved her hands. She still stared straight ahead, out over the beautiful little bay where the *Tani* rocked at anchor; but she seemed, now, to have better control of herself.

"Back there," she whispered. "You do not understand. They are killing the natives back there, as father said they would do. They're hunting them down like pigs and killing them."

"Yes, yes, but—"

"We brought those natives here. My father did. They're indentured. Don't you see? Don't you understand? My father made a five-year labor contract with them, brought them here, promised to feed them and keep them well, to send them back to their homes when

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the contract had expired. Well, the contract has *not* expired. My father was a man of his word, and the plantation is mine now. I have no sister or brother, my mother is dead, the plantation is mine. I am responsible for those natives now. There are sixteen of them, ten men and six women. These fiends are going to kill them. Do you think I can sneak away and let them do it?"

"But *mademoiselle*—You can't do anything alone against a couple of cutthroats like that!"

"I can try. It's my duty. My father would never have shirked his duty, and I will not either." She put a hand on his arm, even smiled a little. "Go to Ambrym and try to get help, if you will. You have been very kind already, considering the way you were greeted when you came to call upon us. But I'm going to stay here. Please don't think I'm crazy! I'm not! But I simply can't go away and leave those poor people to be slaughtered. They're my responsibility. It's different with you; but they're my responsibility."

She meant it too. Her voice was low and even, her gaze direct. Here was no hysteria. Here was a plain determined purpose. Grant Kelsing stared at her in amazement.

"Well, I'll be damned," Grant Kelsing muttered after a moment. "Excuse me, *mademoiselle,* but it happens I never met anybody like you before and never supposed anybody like you even existed. All right. You're the boss here. Let's go after them."

"But it is not necessary that you—"

"Now don't be a fool. You don't suppose I'm going to let you conduct this suicide hunt alone, do you? Come on. If they're going to chase the natives, then *we're* going to chase *them!*" Let's go back there by way of this hibiscus hedge to the edge of the jungle. Let's give ourselves that much of a break anyway. Come on."

IV

AFTERWARD Grant Kelsing remembered that of the whole strange business this was the strangest part. Here he was, an American who until a few hours ago had not known of the existence of this island—who did not know its name even now—here he was in the company of a delicately bred French girl pushing through the dank steaming jungle in search of two desperadoes who in turn were seeking out a scattered panic-stricken group of natives. Here they were, strangers to one another, trudging through thick black muck, tearing their clothes and scratching their skins upon spiked creepers, rounding monstrous tropical trees damp and green with parasites, stumbling, slipping, gasping—she with an empty shotgun while he held only a duelling pistol containing a single cartridge—and they sought to meet and to conquer a couple of hardened criminals armed with the most deadly of all modern weapons.

It was unbelievable. Yet they were sane, they knew what they were doing. Kelsing glanced once at Thérèse Carot. Her face was pale and taut.

Perhaps two thirds of this small island was planted, the rest, around the shores chiefly, remained jungle. They stuck to the jungle for cover, circling the compound, the coconut groves behind the house and outbuildings. Once Kelsing peered through this undergrowth and caught a glimpse of Jacques Ramel behind the house between two palm trees, digging with a spade he had probably found in one of the sheds, digging and digging, sifting the earth as he dug, seeking for something that

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was not there. Ramel worked fast. In a little while he would know that Kelsing had lied to him, and then he would call his companion and they would return to the *kiosque*—and be warned by Kelsing's disappearance.

Kelsing could have killed Ramel as the man dug there—they were not more than thirty feet apart—but this would mean using the only cartridge he possessed and giving alarm to Malraux who had the submachine gun. They pushed on.

A rattle of machine-gun fire a little ahead of them. It was faint and muffled through thick wet foliage reluctant to permit the sound to pass. A native screamed. The gun spoke again, *rat-tat-tat-tat.* Then there was silence. They hurried on.

Kelsing was ahead, though at all times they kept close together for fear of losing one another. It was impossible, in that jungle, to see more than a few feet in any direction. As the American rounded a small tight clump of wild banana trees he heard a guttural sound, half grunt, half growl, almost at his left elbow. He spun on his heel, raising the pistol.

A native was there, behind him another, both of them half naked and mad with fright, their eyes shining with an insane light, their faces working in panic. They supposed that he had seen them, that they were cornered, and they were going to fight. Each had a machete, a long, heavy, single-edged hatchet-knife. One already had his weapon raised.

Kelsing struck him a backhand blow across the face with the barrel of the duelling pistol. The native retreated a step, snarling, spitting blood. Then he came forward again, his companion with him. Kelsing could not possibly talk to them, try to explain. They were mad with fright. They were wild animals, apparently beyond all argument.

Should he shoot? He could only shoot one, at best. He stepped backward, dodged to one side. A machete descended angrily, missing him by inches. But in dodging he had stumbled over a tree root. He fell, sliding in black slimy muck. They rushed toward him, jabbering.

THERESE CAROT'S voice from behind stopped them in their tracks. She was the master's daughter, they were accustomed to obey her; they knew her voice. Rapidly, in low, swift, angry tones, scolding as only a French woman can scold, she poured words at them—French words and pidgin English. It meant nothing to the prostrate Kelsing, but it meant a lot to the natives. With their machetes raised, they paused.

Thérèse Carot took a step toward them. Her voice never ceased. She deluged them with words, buried them in words, low, hot, intense. The raised machetes she ignored. Walking directly to the nearest of the natives, she lifted her hand as though to slap a naughty child in the face.

They turned and fled. For a moment or two Thérèse Carot and Grant Kelsing heard them tearing through the jungle; and then there was silence again. Kelsing rose to his feet, grinning.

"Merci, mademoiselle.

She took his arm. "Come. We must protect them. We must not permit them to be slaughtered."

A quarter of a mile or so further the jungle thinned a bit, and they came abruptly upon Jacques Malraux. He was standing alone in a sort of small clearing, his profile to them, his eyes opened very wide, his head raised,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

listening, like an alert hunter. The machine-gun was at his hip, his right forefinger caressed its trigger. He had heard something. Had he heard them?

A grotesque figure he made as he stood there, this great bearded Frenchman with his yachting cap, his tattooed arms, holding in this remote part of the remotest South Seas an instrument which seemed a toy in his huge paws.

Ramel's voice, loud, firm, commanding, came from somewhere behind them.

"Raymond, *à moi! Au diable avec ces sauvages imbéciles!* Come out here to me! *Ce salaud d'un* American has lied to us, there is nothing buried where he said it would be! *Rien!*"

Malraux started, turned, saw them. His mouth fell open.

Kelsing pushed the girl aside, dropped to one knee. Kelsing fired his shot. He had a cold, certain instinct as he fired that one shot. Something from outside seemed to take possession of all his faculties and to guide them, controling them perfectly. He knew precisely what he was doing. He squeezed the trigger gently, surely, and his gaze was firm along the top of the long blue barrel. He aimed at the Frenchman's heart, knowing that he would hit it. And he did. Malraux probably was dead even as the machine gun started its noise. But he gripped the weapon still, in a dead man's clutch, and his finger remained squeezed on the trigger as he tumbled backward. The thing rattled, spattered spitefully, indignantly. It kicked high in Malraux's grip, and Malraux's fall sent the muzzle even higher.

KELSING waited, the pistol raised, motionless, just as if he had still another shot, or as many more as he wished. It seemed to take a long while for Malraux to fall. And when finally he struck earth, the machine-gun had ceased its racket, and the *thud* of his body hitting was considerable for he had been a heavy man.

Bullet-clipped leaves floated down past Kelsing's head. Kelsing rose. The girl scrambled to her fet. She screamed. She dropped the empty shotgun and ran wildly toward the compound. Kelsing could hear her stumbling through the foliage, slipping, falling, getting up again, stumbling on. She did not scream again.

From somewhere behind Kelsing, Ramel's voice was raised in a startled, *"Qu'est-ce que c'est?"* Then Ramel too started to run toward the compound. Kelsing could not see him—he could not see either of them—but he could hear them.

He could not know, and at the time could not stop to wonder whether Thérèse Carot had in fact lost her head or whether she had deliberately adopted this means to discover Ramel's position in the jungle and to lead him away so that Kelsing could pursue him. He was to learn later that the girl's act had been prompted by the belief that it would give him an opportunity to capture the machine gun. However, he didn't go for the gun, still gripped in Raymond Malraux's dead hands. Instead he went after Ramel and the girl. She was in danger, and this was his only thought. Strategy was forgotten. *She* was in danger.

V

WHEN he reached the coconut groves, where the undergrowth had been kept cut, he saw them ahead of him, the girl fleet as a deer, Ramel behind her, bounding like some huge prehistoric beast. The girl was possibly twenty-five feet ahead. Neither of them

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

looked back, though Ramel, who had evidently heard Kelsing's pursuit and supposed that Kelsing was his partner, shouted over his shoulder:

"She will tell us, Raymond! If the American lies, *she* will tell us!" Ramel still thought, as he had thought all the time, of that one thing only—of the piece of worthless coral which he believed was ambergris and which he supposed was hidden somewhere on the island.

The girl showed no signs of panic. She sprinted like a new Atalanta, head up, arms working at her sides. She broke out from under the coconut trees, raced past the smoke shed, past the drying platform and the sacking house, past the huts where the natives lived, around the house. She did not try to enter the house, though she might have done so. She seemed headed for the *kiosque* at the edge of the cliff.

She had almost reached this building when she slipped upon something and sprawled full length, and Jacques Ramel overtook her.

Also, at this moment, another rainstorm overtook the island. Darkness swarmed over everything. The breeze ceased. Grass, the fronds of palm trees, every piece of vegetation, crouched lower, cowering, waiting breathlessly. And the downpour came.

It was as though the heavens, repeatedly baffled by this tiny island, had decided once and for all to swamp it out of existence, to beat and cram it back into the sea from whence it had sprung. There was decidedly something malicious about it, something even diabolic. No thunder was heard, and there was no lightning; the heavens could not be bothered with such petty, show-off tricks at a time like this; but concentrated rather upon the weight of the rain itself, which was terrific.

RAMEL did not reach down to touch the girl. Instead he stood over her, spread-legged, his fists on his hips. He was laughing. Rain lashed him, swathed him, almost blotted his immense body from sight; but he stood there and laughed.

He turned as he heard Grant Kelsing stagger toward him through the weight of the downpour. "Aha, my Raymond! The little one thought to escape us! I wonder where she supposed she was—" Then he saw Kelsing. And Kelsing sprang.

Kelsing leaped with no plan of action, with no thought of how to attack; but without hesitation. They went down, Kelsing scrabbling for the giant's throat. And here the rain saved Jacques Ramel, whose throat was so wet and slippery so that Kelsing's hands slipped off it. Ramel rolled away, got to his feet as lightly as a boy. Kelsing was on him again.

Jacques Ramel was no stranger to fighting, and surely no coward, but the sheer ferocity of this attack sent him staggering backward. He slipped and fell to one knee. Kelsing's right fist smashed into his mouth, his left fist *clacked* off the giant's cheekbone. Ramel's head rocked, and he made a screechy, squealy sound in his throat. He toppled backward, but even as he did so he threw his gorillalike arms around the American's waist.

Probably neither man had realized that they were so close to the edge of the cliff. Probably neither knew, in that first instant of falling, that they were *over* the edge. There was no swift, melodramatic drop. The cliff was not sheer, and since they had started their Catherine-wheel descent at the very head of the path their locked bodies tumbled and bumped into that path, and down it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brown water, sometimes lashed white, followed them or preceded them as they fell fighting their way down the zigzag. This path, indeed, had been formed, not by man, but by torrents or rain water eager to find the easiest descent and impatient of such obstacles as stones and dirt and coral. Jacques Ramel and Grant Kelsing, as they punched, kicked, bit, butted, took to the path with no more forethought than the rainwater—and for the same reason—because it was the easiest, quickest way down.

Stones showered them, leaping into the air. Dislodged rocks, chunks of razor-sharp coral, hissed in the hissing torrent all around.

And at the head of the path, just outside the *kiosque* in which her father had been murdered, Thérèse Carot stood with her arms crossed over her breast, her head raised, heedless of the heavens' fury, while she prayed in a voice she herself could not hear:

"Save him! *Que le bon dieu lui sauve!* Do not let him be killed!"

Abruptly, almost as though by mechanical arrangement, the storm stopped, the rain departed like an offended guest, in a solid, malevolent body to shatter itself senselessly against the senseless ocean. A few feeble gray ribbons of cloud, left behind by the bulk, hung uncertainly like frightened ghosts, wavered, thinned, and dissolved. The sun smashed through in bitter, vengeful triumph. Thérèse Carot, standing with her arms crossed, her head raised, heard the drip-drop from palm fronds and the eaves of the *kiosque,* heard the roaring streams subside into rivulets and cough themselves out. Soon, too, she heard something else. She heard a panting, gasping breath, the uncertain footsteps of a man—one man—ascending the path at the head of which she stood. One man . . . He came slowly, dizzy with bruises, his head clanging with discordant sound. Chin on his chest, his clothes mere shredded rags, he came nearer.

The girl raised her hand to her mouth and against her trembling fingers once more whispered the name of her God.

Then she could see him and with a little cry, ran forward.

Grant Kelsing put a long wet arm gently across her shoulders, and she knew from the touch that her prayer had been answered, and her nerves were still, her heart hummed, her eyes came open.

"I think that it is over now, Thérèse," Grant Kelsing said quietly.

If you like Orange Pekoe... you'll love

Ridgways

GOLD LABEL TEA

Ask your grocer. For special introductory offer—of 1 Lb. tin Ridgways Gold Label Tea, $1.20 inc. parcel-post charges, send check or money-order (no COD orders) to Ridgways, Inc., 230 West St., N. Y.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Big Wind Blows

By EUSTACE L. ADAMS

MARVIN LEE was by nature a quiet and circumspect young man. In fact, his boss at the Miami bank where he was a bookkeeper, had accused him, a little contemptuously, of having an "orderly mind." That was on the day when Mr. Avery had let Marvin know that the bank had plans for him. A promotion to the tellers' cage, perhaps—but not until Marvin had shown that he had the proper stuff in him.

The way Mr. Avery thought Marvin could prove this sounds a little unpleasant. On one of the mangrove islands off the coast, the Tropical Construction Company is putting up a fisherman's hotel. Their debt to the bank is overdue and they have asked for an extension. Mr. Avery, regretting that he ever loaned the company a penny, has begun to wonder if something isn't wrong on the island. So he has decided to send Marvin Lee to investigate.

Marvin barely reaches the island when things begin to happen—violent, upsetting things. Scoop Sloper, the construction superintendent, a burly-chested bully with one gray eye and one gentle brown one, picks a fight with one Granelli, breaks his arm, kills him.

"Granelli talked too much," Sloper explains ominously. "But the sheriff will see that it was just self-defense." He turns to Marvin. "You're not one of the wise guys, are you? Better not be."

LEE was supposed to work as assistant timekeeper—but Sloper assigns him to back-breaking tasks with air hose and shovel. There is a girl, Linda, on the island, the daughter of the regular timekeeper. She's said to be Sloper's girl, and Marvin is warned to stay away from her. But the warning doesn't seem to be necessary because Linda, thinking he is after her

This story began in last week's Argosy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

father's job, regards him with all the friendly affection she would show to a small snake that had crawled into her shoe.

The third morning on the job, Marvin wakes up with a magnificent hangover, and extremely vague recollections of what had happened the night before. Not a drinking man nor a gambler, he is astonished to learn that while pretty completely under the influence, he won over two hundred dollars at craps, advised old man Hamilton to quit the game if he couldn't lose cheerfully, and picked quarrels with both Sloper and his right-hand man, Cash Childers.

In fact, Marvin seems to be in wrong with everyone on the island except the red-headed Irishman, Malloy. When Malloy is out rustling up some coffee, Marvin looks around to find a place to cache his winnings —and under his pillow, discovers a blood-stained knife. He is pretty well flabbergasted. Did he put the knife under the pillow himself? Did he, perhaps, use it on someone? He can't remember, but he is intelligent enough to know a spot when he's on one.

In the midst of all this, he hears running footsteps and Linda Hamilton's voice crying out, "Someone has killed my father!" Obeying an impulse, Marvin tosses the bloodstained knife out of the window into the waters of the bay. . . .

CHAPTER V

MOTIVE

THE whole barge sounded to the footfalls of running men. Laborers and engineers, eating their early breakfast in the mess hall, led the race through the alleyway toward Scoop's office. Marvin, running just behind Red, joined the throng which crowded around Scoop's door. He was taller than most; he could see fairly well across the heads and shoulders of those who had arrived first.

Already Cash Childers and Luis Cuesta, the dredging boss, were there. With Scoop, they were standing before the girl, whose face was the color of old linen. She could hardly speak. Her blue eyes looked almost black under the unshaded drop light. She had a handkerchief in her hands. Unconsciously her long, slim fingers were working at it, tearing it into tiny bits. In the boyish slacks and knitted sweater, she looked very small and very much alone.

The radio was still playing in the mess hall, grinding out its incongruously animated swing music as if there were no tragedy or heartbreak in all the world.

"—and you say he was knifed, Linda?" Scoop was asking, his voice carrying clearly through the hoarse mutters of the men and the music from the radio.

"Yes. In the back," Linda said in a low, unbelieving tone. "Oh, can't somebody turn off the radio?"

"Turn the blasted thing off!" somebody in the crowd snapped.

"No!" Scoop called commandingly. "Leave it on. Sorry, Linda, but we're listening for another weather advisory. It's important. Tell us what happened."

"I—I didn't know Dad hadn't come to the houseboat last night. I knew he was gambling here, so I went to sleep. When I knocked this morning and he didn't answer, I looked into his cabin and it hadn't been slept in. So I thought maybe he—he was—was . . ."

"Drunk?" Cash Childers asked; the tic in his cheek made his lips jerk violently.

"Well, yes," Linda said. "If you have to play jazz music does it have to be so loud?"

It was clear that she was almost at the breaking point. Scoop looked at her carefully. Then, over the heads of the listening men, he called, "Mike, turn

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that down and sit beside it. If the Weather Bureau starts an announcement, turn it all the way up again."

"So what happened?" Cash Childers said.

"So I started over to see if he was here," Linda went on. Her voice was a dead monotone and her gallant effort to be calm tore at Marvin's heartstrings. "I was halfway there and I saw something—saw him—"

"Steady, Linda, steady," said Scoop's voice.

"—lying just inside the bulkhead."

"Where, Linda?" Scoop asked, and Marvin noticed that he was looking at her, not with the gray eye, but with the brown one. "Whereabouts inside the bulkhead?"

"About—well, as if he had been—sick, sort of, and had fallen off the bulkhead and gone to sleep. I—I jumped down. He was lying on his face and—and his back was all—bloody!"

LINDA gathered in her breath and her voice went up the scale. But she saw all the men looking at her. She let her breath run out and stood steady, but she was shaking all over.

"We'll have a look, Linda," Scoop said. Then, to the men, "Listen, mugs," he said. "This is no convention. You all heard what happened. Unless somebody came ashore last night in a boat from one of the other islands, the man who killed the timekeeper is on this job—or was. Luis, run out and see if the power boat and the rowboats are still here. And put someone on guard to see they stay here."

His gray eye swung across the intent faces of the waiting men. It struck Marvin Lee's with the force of a slap and hung there, hard, sardonic and questioning. Then, to Marvin's infinite relief, it moved on.

"You can't gang us while we're out there, men," Scoop went on. "So get to work. When we find anything out, you'll know. Now get out on the job. Scram!"

"Let's go, Buck," Red said, plucking at Marvin's sleeve.

But Marvin stood stock still, his mind awhirl. Now he knew, and definitely, that the knife he had pitched out of the window was the one which had cut the life out of Linda's father. But who had put it under his pillow? Or had he—and he knew this must be faced sooner or later—put it there himself during those hours which were beyond the power of his memory to bring back? The possibility that he himself had murdered Hamilton in a drunken argument was sickening to consider. But consider it he must.

"Come on, Buck!" Red repeated impatiently.

Dully Marvin Lee turned away; his sight seemed to be dazed and fascinated by the girl, whose tragic eyes were staring out over the sea and whose fingers were playing a senseless game with the handkerchief she held crumpled in her hands.

The eastern sky was painted with the flaming colors of dawn, long bars of crimson, purple, and green slanted fanwise above the island-studded horizon. Each kaleidoscopic shade was reflected upon the glassy surface of the sea in pastel tints casting a soft, gentle glow over the sides of the shabby construction buildings and the skeletonlike structure of the pile driver.

"Pretty, ain't it?" Red said, inadequately.

Marvin, trudging wearily toward the shoreward end of the discharge pipe, deliberately turned his mind away from Linda and from the problem of the knife and from the huddled body which

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be somewhere in the black shadow of the bulkhead over there to the east. Perhaps in a little while, when all the alcoholic fumes had cleared from his brain, he would be able to remember things.

He surveyed the wild, dark colors of the sunrise without pleasure. It reminded him too vividly of a fantastically beautiful sunrise over Miami one September morning when he had been only thirteen. He'd always remembered that day because twenty-four hours later big boats had lain careened in Royal Palm Park, and dead fish had been found in first-floor apartments on the Beach, and ruin and tragedy had been everywhere. Death? Tragedy? No, he mustn't think of those things now. He mustn't even turn his head to see the little group of men and the slender, feminine figure who were hurrying along the top of the bulkhead toward the houseboat.

"I don't like sunrises like this in the fall," he told Red, pinning his mind to the subject at hand. "And of all the places in the world I don't want to be during a hurricane is right here, on the keys. Remember Matecombe Key, just a few miles to the eastward?"

"No," Red said, inattentively, looking over his shoulder toward the bulkhead.

MARVIN remembered. After the horrible Labor Day storm two years before, he had gone south from Miami to look at the desolate key where half a thousand veterans had perished in a maelstrom of screaming wind and water. And the things he had seen he did not even want to think about. If he could deliberately start worrying about a storm, perhaps he would not worry so much about other things.

"Red," he said, suddenly, "were you in the cabin last night when I came in?"

"No," Red said, glancing again toward the bulkhead. "I was aft in Mike Hennessy's cabin playing a hand of seven-up."

"But you said you helped me count the money I won in that crap game before you poured me into by berth. How come?"

"When I got into the room," Red said, stumbling over a mangrove root, "you was sitting in that bentwood chair, holding your head in your hands and talking about not wanting to climb any mountain to go to bed. I said, 'What Mountain?' and you pointed to the upper berth and offered me twenty bucks for my lower. When you pulled out your wad to pay me, you didn't know how much was in it, so we counted it. Then I put you to bed and climbed into the upper myself."

"So you don't know what time it was when I came in?" They had reached the pile of shovels and stood over them, reluctant to begin the day's labor. Little groups of men were moving darkly through the pink-tinted gloom. They were all talking in hushed voices, and every now and then they stopped to glance back toward the bulkhead. "You don't know," Marvin asked in a desperate whisper, "how long it was after—after—"

Red picked up a shovel and weighed it in his hands. Carefully he looked around. Then his eyes met Marvin's fully.

"After you went out on deck, arguing with Hamilton?" he asked, evenly.

Marvin gasped. He reached out and grabbed Red's wrist. "Red!" he whispered, shakily. "Do—do you believe I killed him?"

Red spat deliberately. "Well, I wouldn't know," he said in measured tones. "Did you?"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I—I don't know!" Marvin answered, dully. "They say I went out on deck, arguing with him. I don't remember that. The last thing I remember is telling Hamilton a few things about gambling and being a good sport. Then I draw a complete blank. Nothing . . ."

"I've heard better alibis," Red said, pensively. "Was I you, I'd figure out another one."

Marvin's voice hardened. "I'm not trying to figure out anything except what actually happened!"

Red's eyes were searching Marvin's face, appraising the hard emotion which played across it, studying his features, one by one. Then, he said slowly:

"Buck," he said, "I don't believe you done it. You're a queer egg. There's lots of things about you I don't get. But you don't look like a feller who'd stab anybody in the back. So help me, you don't."

"What would I want to stab him for?" Marvin demanded, desperately.

"Well, there's those who might say you done it to get Hamilton's job. You came down here to be his assistant. You're a white-collar man and you don't take natural-like to muscle-work. So if you could—Ssssh!"

His voice ended in a warning whisper. He swung his shovel and busily began to lengthen a furrow started the previous afternoon to direct the flow of sand-carrying water toward the adjacent mangroves. "Get goin', guy," he murmured. "Snap into it."

The dark figure of a workman Marvin di' not recognize had drifted close to them. He stood within easy earshot, pretending to look for something on the sand.

"Well, what do *you* want?" Marvin snarled in a surprisingly vicious tone. He hadn't ever heard himself make a sound like that. Its effect now though was instantaneous.

The laborer muttered something and went away. Marvin took up a shovel and began to dig beside Red with short, furious jabs. If he worked hard enough, fast enough, he might dull his brain so he would not ask himself so many questions.

But he didn't succeed. No matter how fast his hands worked his brain went on working, too. What had he done during those lost hours—or minutes—between the time he and Linda's father had gone on deck and Red had found him in his cabin? Who had put that knife under his pillow? Who wanted to frame him? Scoop? Cash Childers? Luis Cuesta, the dredger boss? Who, then? And why should it be he they wanted to frame?

There were no answers to any of those questions. Dimly, as he labored there beside the only man on the job who had been at all friendly, came other questions, just as unanswerable, just as disturbing

WHERE was the quiet, soft-spoken young man who had come aboard only yesterday, his hands soft from years of clerical work? The young man who had been Marvin Lee seemed to have stepped through a veil, a curtain, of violence and disappeared into a world as different from the one he had formerly known as day is different from night, as a September hurricane is different from a calm May morning. Then people had called him Marvin—now they called him Buck, and he won money from them at craps, and he had got drunk, and he asked people what they were doing around here, and he was—or would be—suspected of murder!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And Jennifer! It required a distinct effort, now, to remember Jennifer, so far had she—and the bank—slipped into the obscurity of yesterday's past. Lee tried to recall the precise pitch of her calm, even voice, tried to picture the way she lifted her clear and confident hazel eyes to him as she talked. It seemed odd to him that anyone could be so calm, so confident, about anything as Jennifer was about everything.

Shoveling away there in blind misery, he tried to remember the exact shade of Jennifer's hair. Brown, he thought, but in the eyes of his mind he could see it only as a bright and vivid yellow. He attempted to picture her nose; his reason told him it was straight and a little bit large, but he kept seeing it as small, and insolently uptilted at the end, with freckles scattered over it.

"Red!" Lee said in a sudden panic at the insecure hold he had on everything he had once known, once thought important in his life. "Red! Is there a boat around here? Even a rowboat? I could row from one island to another and maybe get to the Overseas Highway. I could hitch-hike back to Miami from there. I've got to get away from here. I've got to, I tell you!"

Red straightened up and leaned on the long handle of his shovel. It was lighter, now. In a few minutes the sun would be above the horizon. It was light enough to see the growing suspicion, the growing regret, in Red's eyes.

"No," he said, in a voice suddenly icy. "You couldn't get away with it. But go ahead and try it if you want to. It's all right with me."

For a moment Marvin Lee just looked at him, chilled by the sudden loss of friendliness in Red's voice.

"What's the matter, Red?" he asked.

"Well," Red said, his voice still frozen. "Hamilton was a louse and a drunk and as crooked as they come. But I never thought much of guys who use a knife, and the lowest rat in the world is one that stabs in the back."

Contemptuously he turned around and went back to his digging. Bright anger flamed up in Lee. He put his hand on Red's shoulder and swung him around so swiftly that Red almost pitched to the sand.

"You're just trying to get my goat, aren't you, Red?" he demanded in a voice that was steady and low. "Tell me you're just trying to get my goat, Red, or I'll—" The thought came to him suddenly, and an elated, angry astonishment filled him. "I'll smash you one!" he finished.

His face was set and white. There was a crazy glitter to his eyes. Red looked at him and grinned all over.

"Okay, kid," Red said gently. "I didn't like your talk of runnin' out on this thing. That's all. You had me worried. Sure now, what would you want to run away from?"

"Myself, Red," Lee said, sudden weariness flooding over him. "Just myself. Things like this never happened to me before. But I'll ride it through here and take the breaks as they come."

Red rubbed the fiery stubble on his big jaw. "Hold on there, Buck. It might be better, at that, for you to light out of here. You took a crack at Scoop last night. You've busted Cash Childers twice, which is just twice more than is healthy. You got into an argument with Hamilton. And now he's dead—and you ain't even sure you didn't kill him. And that's piling up an awful bundle of trouble against yourself. And even worse than that, nobody on this job has got you spotted yet. As a matter of fact, I haven't myself."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Spotted?"

"Yeah. Spotted. A guy who works in a bank don't naturally take to swinging a shovel unless he's got some special reason to. It's too easy to get jobs on the mainland jerking sodas and toting packages out of grocery stores."

"Why should they care?"

Once again that look, that hidden expression, came into Red's eyes. "There you go again," he sighed. "Look, let me give you a tip. This afternoon a fast motor boat might stop here. If there isn't a storm, that is. If a boat comes, you just turn your back and never once look at it. Just be as busy as you can minding your own business, see? At that," he added in a discouraged voice, "I don't believe you will. You're just fool enough to go trolloping all over the place asking questions. Why I like you, I dunno. If I had any brains in me skull at all I'd keep a couple of islands between you and me. The thing might be contagious."

"What thing?"

But Red did not try to answer. Turning back to his shovel, he said, mournfully, "You're a nice young feller, Buck. It's sorry I'll be to see you get it."

CHAPTER VI

HATE

THEY carried the body of Linda's father to the crews' barge. Just after nine o'clock the work launch, with one man aboard, put off from the barge, turned in a wide circle and headed southward toward Key West, the county seat. Rumor, flying from man to man, announced that Scoop was sending for the sheriff. "For which murder?" Marvin Lee said, with some bitterness. "Granelli, or Hamilton?"

A workman who had drifted close to Red looked at him in horror, and walked swiftly away. Red shook his head gloomily, but said nothing. He and Lee were fitting a new length of pipe to the now-silent discharge line. Lee, remembering how Luis Cuesta had yesterday turned the water on before he had stepped away from the outlet, lifted his head and gazed toward the dredger boss, who was standing some distance away, watching him. Across a hundred feet of blinding white sand their eyes met and held. Cuesta dropped his gaze first. Lee was unhurried as he moved away from the outlet. Then, and not until then, did Cuesta lift his hand in signal for the engineer on the dredger to begin pumping.

The sun was now an incandescent ball, rising high above the horizon. Marvin Lee began to sweat, his muscles knotted in protest at what they were asked to do. But nobody worked at much of a pace. There was a stretching tension over them all. The men leaned on their tools to stare uneasily at the cloudless sky or to look somberly at the barge. It seemed as if all of them were waiting for something to happen and they worked only in spasms in spite of Luis Cuesta's efforts to spur them on.

Just after eleven a new rumor raced like a scrub fire across the island. The forenoon weather advisory, said someone, had just been received, and it was bad news. Red and Lee went over to a group in search of details. The Caribbean hurricane, said a ratty little stakeman named Garside, had turned north and was now somewhere over Cuba, heading northward into the Florida Keys. A day ago, even a few hours ago, Lee's blood would have frozen at the possibility of being caught in this danger spot at such a time.

But now he was thinking of Linda's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

father, and about the knife that had killed him, and about that frightening gap in his own memory; there was no room in his mind for worrying about a storm.

Just before noon, Scoop Sloper and Linda came down the gangway and strolled across the uneven sand. The laborers were galvanized into instant activity. Men who had been stealing a few minutes of rest in the shade of the pile-driver began to scurry about, looking for things to do. Even the cadence of that mighty hammer, driving the long pilings into the sand, speeded up as the engineer glanced out of his window and saw the superintendent come ashore.

"Buck," Red murmured, "bend your back. The boss is putting the evil eye on us."

The two of them had been shoveling a low barricade to retain the water in a depression until the sand settled out of it. Marvin Lee glanced up without much interest until he saw Linda walking beside Scoop. The super was looking from side to side, accurately appraising the yardage which had been pumped since dawn. Linda just walked. Lee straightened his aching back and bore his weight down on the long handle of his shovel.

"Wouldn't you pick a time like this to take a little nap!" Red snapped, digging vigorously.

But Marvin Lee paid no attention. It was odd, he thought, how his nerves jangled whenever Scoop Sloper came near. He had disliked other people, plenty of them; the assistant cashier, who smirked at every pretty girl who went by; a bank examiner who seemed obsessed by the idea that Marvin was covering up some deep plot for making away with the whole contents of the vaults; Jennifer's mother, who wondered all too audibly why Marvin had not enthusiastically seconded Jennifer's invitation for her to make her permanent home with them as soon as they were married. These he had thought he hated wholeheartedly. But now, watching Sloper approaching with Linda Hamilton beside him, Lee knew that he had not, really, hated them at all. He had just disliked them. Seeing them had not made hatred bite into him like a corrosive, did not make the inside of his mouth run dry, did not finally make him want to rush at them to tear them to pieces.

THE pair came to a stop before him. Scoop's hard gray eye was full on Lee's passive face. And Lee looked at Linda, who was regarding him quietly, searchingly, as if in his expression she could read what he was thinking. Suddenly he wanted to tell her about last night—*all* about last night—about his getting drunk, about his argument with her father, everything. Yes, and about the knife, too. But Scoop Sloper's first words clapped a gag over his mouth.

"Lee, where did you go last night after the game?" So there it was. It was coming. Red stopped digging and listened.

"I went on deck with Mr. Hamilton."

"See?" Scoop said to Linda. "I told you."

Lee's eyes narrowed. "Told her what?"

"They told me you went out on deck with Dad, and went ashore with him," Linda said in a low unsteady voice.

"You wouldn't be accusing me of stabbing Mr. Hamilton in the back, would you?" He was standing quite still, his eyes clashing with those of Scoop's, and every muscle in his body was restless for action.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now you've mentioned it," Scoop said, levelly, "it seems like maybe it was a reasonable idea."

With all the look of an accident, the shovel that had been touching the ground swung upward. The sharp cutting edge of it was very close to Scoop's hard-muscled stomach.

"Buck," Red begged, unhappily. "Don't start playing rough. First thing you know we'll—"

"Who saw me go ashore with Mr. Hamilton?" Lee's voice was low, thin, dangerous.

"I'll bring them out when the sheriff gets here," said Scoop, eyeing the shovel thoughtfully.

"Fair enough. And until you do, we won't talk about it at all." He took a short step forward. The knife-edged shovel almost touched Scoop's shirt. All Lee had to do would be to swing his weight against the handle, and that would be that. The superintendent stared at the poised blade. He made no effort to sidestep, nor to grab it out of Lee's hands. His head came up and his gray eye put a wicked pressure against the still-faced young man before him.

"Put that shovel down. Somebody might get hurt."

Linda gasped.

"Look, boss," Red said, his voice shaky. "Go away, will you? Don't you know when the fuse is burning close to the powder?"

Very carefully, Scoop Sloper took one step backward. His breath ran out in a long hissing sigh. He said, "Come on," to Linda, and began to walk toward the pile-driver. Linda followed, looking back at Lee, her eyes alive with an expression he could not read. Scoop took a dozen paces. Then he stopped. Turning toward Red, he said:

"You know what we do with fuses that burn too fast?"

"Sure, I know," Red said, sorrowfully. "But don't do it to this one, boss. Not yet, anyway. He might go 'Pop!' right in your face. I got a feeling about him."

He turned away and began to dig at the sand with short, wild strokes. Scoop Sloper took his own time in leaving, and while he lingered, Lee remained rigid as any statue, gripping that shovel so hard the muscles trembled all up and down his arm. Recklessness stirred in his blue eyes and unsettling emotion had changed the lines of his face, wiping away every vestige of timidity and leaving something in its place which Scoop was trying hard to identify.

The superintendent had his last word. "You're asking for it, Lee," he said, quietly. With that he walked away, heading toward the pile driver which was dropping its heavy hammer on a long, black piling.

"Go on, Scoop," Linda said. "No, don't come with me. I'll be right over."

SHE turned back, walking back with a free, graceful stride. She came and stood so close to him that the natural perfume of her hair drifted sweetly to his nostrils.

"Who are you, really?" she asked.

"I'm Marvin Lee."

"I know," she said, with a trace of impatience. "But you aren't a laborer. You aren't even a timekeeper. Are you a detective?"

"No, I'm not a detective. I'm what I told Sloper yesterday I was. I'm—or I was—a bank clerk. I worked in the bookkeeping department of a bank."

"Why," Linda asked in a very small voice, "would you want to kill my father?"

Lee glanced over her head to see Sloper marching back with long, angry strides. Then Linda saw him, too, half

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

turning at the glare of anger on Marvin Lee's face. "Scoop!" she said. "Go back! I want to talk to this man alone."

Scoop Sloper's face came on, almost at a run. Red Malloy, standing just behind Marvin, groaned. Lee stood very still, looking across Linda's head at Scoop.

"What are you talking about?" Scoop demanded, in a voice as breathless as if he had run a thousand yards.

"If you don't go away," Linda said, very quietly, "I'll talk about a lot of things."

Scoop wrapped his huge hand around Linda's arm and put pressure on it, pulling her away. Lee's lungs felt as if there were a steel band around them that was being pulled tighter and tighter.

"Wait a minute!" he said.

Scoop and Linda stopped and looked at him. Of the two, Sloper was easily the more surprised.

"Is it true," Lee demanded, "that your father was stabbed in the back?"

"Yes," the girl said, unsteadily. "I saw the wounds."

"I wouldn't stab a man in the back," Lee said, slowly. "Drunk or sober, I wouldn't stab a man in the back. Not ever, I wouldn't."

"Are you coming, Linda?" Scoop said, his voice thick with fury.

But the girl tagged back. "Yesterday afternoon," she said, very slowly, "I'd have said you weren't the killer type. Now I'm not sure. You have killing in you. I can see it on your face."

If it was on Lee's face, it was on Scoop's face, too. He was looking straight at Lee, and his lips were so thinned down that he appeared to have no mouth at all. Slowly his right hand crept back toward his hip pocket. Lee did not notice. He had not yet learned that a man's life sometimes depends upon noticing everything. But Red noticed.

"Scoop," he said, moving up beside Lee. "It would be a mistake."

"Go away," Lee said, tautly. "I can handle this myself."

THEN, and for the first time, Linda Hamilton's eyes drifted to Scoop. And instantly she saw what Scoop was doing with his right hand. "You fool!" she said.

She pulled her slender body away with astonishing strength. Scoop Sloper still had her arm gripped in his left hand. Her movement pulled him off-balance.

"Get away from me or I'll—" he snarled.

"You think I don't know what's going on around here?" she flamed out at him. "You think I don't know what you made Dad do to the time-sheets? You think I don't know what that cabin cruiser comes for once a week?"

All the heavy muscles in Scoop Sloper's body seemed to freeze. He stood exactly where he was for a dozen slow seconds. Then, inch by inch, his head came around and he looked at Linda. At the expression on his face, Lee went taut. Then Red Malloy's hand dropped heavily on Lee's arm.

"You wouldn't be threatening me, would you, Linda?"

"No, I'm not threatening you, Sloper," Linda said through white lips. "But I've seen trouble wherever you are. So I'm telling you."

It was Scoop's gray eye now that was looking at Linda. Lee did not know what all this was about but he did know his nerves were jumping and twitching, and he knew that more than anything in the world he wanted to put his hands on Scoop Sloper and to find out, then and there, whether he could use his fists

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

or not. And that was a strange sensation for Marvin Lee to be having.

"Okay, Linda," Scoop said, suddenly. His voice had gone soft, but there was no softness in that gray eye of his as it swung from Linda to Lee. "You win. We've got plenty to do today without arguing."

Without another word Scoop walked away, and Linda went with him. Suddenly Marvin began to shake. The handle of the shovel slipped out of his relaxing hands.

"Red," he said in an incredulous whisper, "if he had kept his hands on her another second I'd have—I'd have tried to kill him!"

"You're telling me!" Red said, his breath escaping in a long whisper. "Listen, just before my sainted grandpa died, rest his drunken soul, I promised him I'd never take a hand in any game where I couldn't shuffle the deck myself. Now why do I buy me a stack of chips in this one? Tell me that, will you? And I can feel it coming on, I can."

Blindly Marvin reached for his fallen shovel. He groped for it twice before his shaking fingers closed around the handle. He was spent by the violence of his anger, bewildered by the knowledge that a very few seconds ago he had been willing—no, eager—to kill a man. And if he had been in a killing mood sober, how could he know that last night he hadn't—killed? How did he know that he hadn't put that knife under his pillow—himself?

For the second time in some twenty hours it seemed to him that he was adrift in a storm of violence and that all the remembered things of his life were sliding away into some limbo of peace and security he could never find again.

CHAPTER VII

MÊLÉE

IT WAS three o'clock that afternoon when the great Coast Guard plane came roaring over the island to drop the block of red-painted wood that had a crimson streamer attached to it. The amphibian hurtled directly across the heads of the staring men and the red streamer fluttered down in its wake. Printed in black letters against the fabric were two ominous words:

Hurricane Warning

That ended all work for the day. Construction work anyway. Some of the men had seen at Matecombe Key what a hurricane could do. Vividly they described to silent, anxious groups how the rising water had licked away great sections of the viaduct which carried the Overseas Railway to Key West; how it had lifted heavy steel rails from the top of the twenty-foot embankment; how it had picked up a great locomotive and tossed it like a pebble into the mangrove, where it still lay with dozens of overturned motor cars, rusting monuments to the indescribable savagery of the elements.

And remembering, they looked at each other fearfully and shuddered inwardly as terror's cool hand gripped their bellies.

Now, looking up at the sky, it was difficult for any of them to believe that such a storm could be close by. All morning the sky had been cloudless, not even the smallest puff-ball of cumulus drifting across its turquoise expanse. The horizon was a sharp ruled line and the scattering of mangrove keys in the distance had stood out with unusual clarity. Just after noon, however, a thin, almost indistinguishable

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

film of cirrus had spread across the heavens. It was scarcely more than a high haze, and so imperceptibly had it come up from the southeast that none of the workmen had noticed it. And for the past hour a tiny bank of white cloud was gradually lifting above the horizon.

It looked like a dab of whipped cream, harmless and beautiful.

Scoop Sloper glanced briefly at the message block. "All right, boys," he said to the milling group of restless workmen, "knock off for the afternoon. Four of you help Luis Cuesta put out the extra anchors and cables. Get the barge and the dredge ready to ride it out."

"Yeah," said the ratty little stakeman, Garside, "and what about us?"

"The head office'll have gotten the advisory warning from the Weather Bureau hours ago," Scoop said, easily. "The supply boat'll be on its way down right now to take us off. You don't have nothing to worry about."

"Take us off to where?" one of the engineers asked.

"The government has built hurricane-proof houses on half a dozen keys since the last storm," Scoop said. "We'll hole up in one of them until the blow is over. Chances are it'll miss us. Most of them change their courses after the warnings are out."

For a second the group stood motionless as statues, unwilling to move, to separate. Then, dull-eyed and leaden-footed, because there was nothing else to do, they broke apart.

"Get goin'," Sloper barked after them, his voice sharp with tension.

So Marvin Lee and Red and others went to work carrying out extra anchors and bending heavy hawsers to the bollards at both square ends of the crews' barge and the dredger. A gang anchored the pile-driver to dead-men buried deep in the island sand. Groups were feverishly busy closing the heavy shutters at the windows and bracing them with two-by-four battens.

IT WAS queer, Lee thought, how the nerves of men tightened during the hours which preceded a hurricane. He had noticed it in Miami, where, on the day before a storm, men gathered on the sidewalks in clotted groups, talking about the last advisory; where all business stopped while merchants and householders boarded up their windows; where Boy Scouts went from house to house passing out printed slips telling where to go for milk, water, and medical attention. With those visual evidences of impending calamity, people talked loudly, started violently at every unusual sound and became more irritable as the slow hours inched past.

Here, on an unstable platform directly in the path of a hurricane wind and a hurricane sea, it was worse. Garside got into a knife skirmish because he answered curtly when a Cuban laborer asked him for a match. Red Malloy, usually good-natured, knocked Luis Cuesta down when the dredger boss cursed him for being slow in belaying a hawser. Nerves were taut and raw. The fear of fear, as much as fear itself, tormented them all.

Panic rustled among them, and while most of them could fight it down, it had got inside of them, tangling their senses and magnifying every action, every thought, every word.

And Lee hurried through the alleyways on his errand with a face that became grimmer and grimmer. A dozen times he stopped for a brief glance at the barometer which hung on the bulkhead just outside Scoop's office. Others

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stopped, too. They tapped the glass and shook their heads when the black pointer jerked downward across the gauge. At noon it had stood at 29.88. Now it indicated 28.72, having dropped two one-hundredths of an inch when his finger tapped the case.

He, like most of the others, had lost count of the number of times he had looked eagerly toward the keys to the northeast hoping to see the supply boat on its way to take them off. Almost as eagerly he looked out of the windows to the south, his eyes searching the horizon for a possible glimpse of the work launch, returning with the sheriff. He did not mind the coming of the law —or so he thought until he remembered the knife, and then he felt like a trapped animal, knowing that he was caught, knowing that something terrible was going to happen, and unable to imagine any way out.

He was in a trap. His hands, it seemed, were chained. And only flimsy walls separated him from wild beasts that were ready to spring at him. There was nothing he could do about it, either.

And he was feeling like that, desperate, lost, and unsure of everything, when he heard the voices in the next cabin—the voices which were, among themselves, deciding his fate for him.

He had just entered one of the two-bunk cabins to batten down the shutter. It was only five o'clock, but the veil of cirrus clouds overhead had thickened and lowered. Small, fleecy balls of cumulus clouds were chasing one another across the sky, coming low and fast, and bringing with them small puffs of wind which caused the big barge to stir uneasily at her hawsers.

He was just reaching for the heavy shutter when the sound of Cash Childer's voice came through the matched-wood partition. He heard his own name, it brought him up all standing.

"It's this Lee guy, I'm telling you!" said the voice, angrily. "If he ever gets ashore at Miami, we're cooked!"

"Or if he get ashore anywhere else," said someone with a Spanish accent. Luis Cuesta, Buck decided, putting his ear close to the partition.

"Who," came the unmistakable tones of Scoop Sloper, "is going to take the word of a murderer? We've got him cold."

"Listen," said Cash Childers earnestly, "it doesn't matter whether they convict him or not. All he's got to do is to tell about you stomping Granelli, and about Abrams coming here in his boat—"

"Abrams might never get here, with this storm coming up," Scoop Sloper said, coolly. "And anyway, the sheriff—"

Someone on the deckhouse roof just over Lee's head dropped an armful of battens and Scoop's final words were blanked out by the noise. It blanked out something else, too—the sound of the door behind Lee swinging open on its hinges.

"What are you doing in my cabin with your ear against the wall?" roared an outraged voice from the doorway.

Lee's heart came up to choke him. Straightening up swiftly, he spun around to see the man who had, that morning, tried to overhear his conversation with Red Malloy. There was a sound of scraping chairs, of trampling feet from the next cabin.

"I was fixing the shutters," Lee said, grimly. "Now you fix them yourself." And he started to walk past the intruder. But he didn't get very far. In a moment, it seemed, the doorway was packed solid with men. There were really only four of them—Scoop, Cash

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Childers, Luis Cuesta and the man whose cabin this was. But those four were enough. Lee fell back one step. His right hand closed tightly around the curved back of the bentwood chair.

"So you were listening," Scoop said, with his gray eye just a tiny hard slit.

"Yes, I was listening," Lee agreed. "I heard my name, so why wouldn't I listen?"

"I told you he was bad news," Cash Childers said bleakly.

"Come in," Scoop said over his shoulder. "Come in and shut that door. Lock it."

The four men herded into that narrow room, almost filling the inboard end of it. Luis Cuesta was last in. Lee heard the key grind in the lock.

His fists clenched.

"I'll take him first," Scoop said, licking his thin lips. "You'd come creeping around us, would you?" he snarled.

PANIC flooded into all the recesses of Lee's mind. He was trapped like a rat—and in a few minutes he'd be dead, the life stamped out of him under Scoop Sloper's boots! He could see it in Scoop's narrowed eyes, could read it in the cruelly avid expression on the three other faces. The window was behind Lee's back, but even in his quick rush of fear, he knew there would be no use trying to escape through it. They would catch his feet and haul him shamefully back into the room to finish their job there.

They would pound and smash at him with their fists—pile on him, venting their brute rage. A knife slash, he thought, would end it—as it had ended things for Linda Hamilton's father.

And then the heart-stopping fear left him; icy rage took its place—all in fractions of a second. It wasn't his fault these men were crooks. And now, because they were crooks, afraid of being found out, they were going to kill him—and nothing he could do or say would stop them. Or would it—if he acted quick enough? The bentwood chair seemed to swing up of its own accord. But his two hands were clamped tightly around the back of it and the four legs were pointing straight at Scoop, who had just five more steps to take before he'd reach Lee's throat.

All Buck's one hundred eighty-five pounds of flesh and bone and muscle flowed sweetly forward behind the outward plunging legs of that chair. The four straight rods of hardwood swished straight forward like four hurtling spears. Scoop was quicker than the others. He dropped to the floor like a falling sandbag. But one of the lower legs of that wicked weapon caught the top of his head just above the hairline. With Lee's weight behind it, the chair was not even deflected. The leg was like a plow, turning up a furrow across the top of Sloper's scalp.

Lee's wild forward rush came to a sudden stop. His hurtling knees banged against Scoop's fallen body. Lee's legs stopped going forward, but all the rest of his body plummeted ahead with the chair. There were too many men in front of him. Their expressions swiftly changed when they saw the chair coming ahead of Lee's crazy charge. They jostled one another in an effort to get clear. Luis Gomez reached for his hip, but Cash Childers jostled him and Gomez couldn't use his hand. Meanwhile Lee took three flying steps, tripped and dived forward with the reckless, blind momentum of a speeding bullet.

Flesh melted before him. He hurtled through a twisting wall of it.

One leg of the chair struck Cash Childer's chest, staggered him, glanced

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

off. The other, swerving, caught Luis Cuesta in the throat—did not stop there. Then the chair flew apart with a crack of splintering wood and Lee was insanely clubbing Cash Childers with stumpy pits of the bentwood back which splintered more with every succeeding blow.

Noise rolled back and forth between the cabin's narrow walls, ricocheted from floor to ceiling. Lee's breath was coming in strangled sobs. Luis Cuesta, suddenly sitting down, grabbed his throat with both hands, opened his eyes wide and began to scream with a horrible bubbling sound which Buck did not even hear. Scoop Sloper groaned just once, shook away the gush of blood which welled down from his split scalp and pushed himself slowly to his feet.

Cash Childers, ducking under the wildly flailing blows from the splintered chair, ducked and threw both his arms around Buck's waist. Lee, swinging his whole body rearward, brought his knee up with shocking force, felt it smash full into Childers' face, felt Childers' arms loosen and fall away.

Scoop Sloper, picking himself up, called in a half-dazed voice, "Swaybell, get him!"

Swaybell? So that was the man who'd discovered Lee in this room. Lee shot a look around. Swaybell's fist crashed heavily into Lee's cheekbone, knocked him flat on the floor. Then three men were on top of him, and one was beside him. A foot reached out of nowhere and crashed into his shoulder. He caught the foot, yanked with all his might. He saw a face close to his. He couldn't get his hands free; they were under somebody. He lifted his head and butted it full force into that down-turned face so close above him. Teeth scored his forehead and he felt lips go soft and flat under his upward-ranging blow. He got his hands free and hit out aimlessly. But all the time all of them kept on hitting at him. He had long since realized that his defense was hopeless. But he couldn't just lie still and let them kill him. And besides, his hatred was a boiling thing, searing his very soul. He wanted to do what damage he could before they finished him off.

HE hardly felt the blows that crashed against him. His brain was a thing apart from all this. He seemed to be drawing farther and farther away from pain, from the savagery of slugging and kicking and gouging. When he jabbed his thumb straight up at a glaring eye, he did so with a beautiful sense of detachment; when two thumbs closed around his throat, and he stopped breathing, and the vivid pain knifed all through him, it did not seem to be himself that was stiffening out, fanning the air with his hands, drumming against the floor with his heels.

As if from a million miles away he heard a voice rasping through the hurly-burly of sound around him.

"Look, Scoop, I hate to butt in, but stand aside or I'll blow the living daylights right through your yellow belly. Swaybell, get your hands away, and get them away fast!"

The voice was calm, detached, and richly burred. Magically Lee could breathe again and he dragged in great gulps of air which raked his aching windpipe like sandpaper. The strength had gone out of him; he tried to roll over, but his arms and legs had just about given up. He lay there, seeing three pairs of legs standing beside him, seeing the legs turn to face the window.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He dragged in a deep breath that hurt his lungs and spread white fire through his chest.

Red Malloy, resting a big automatic on the window sill, grinned in at them. "Scoop, I promised my grandpa with the last breath he ever took, that I'd mind my own business and stay out of private fights. But that feller Buck, there, well, seems to me he's had about all he can stand. I wouldn't slap him around any more."

Marvin, seeming to float between two worlds, heard a frantic knocking on the door. "Scoop!" came Linda's voice. "Scoop! What are you doing? Open that door!"

"Red," said Scoop, very slowly, "I guess this places you."

"Always the peacemaker," Red said, gloomily. "That's me. Step aside, Scoop. I'd like to see how that kid is."

Vaguely Lee realized that the tension in that room had once again become a stretching thing, expanded almost to the breaking point. He took a long breath and pulled his legs up, wishing they would wait until he had time to get a little more of his strength back. He got his head around and saw Red, gloomy and apologetic, clambering in through the window and noticed, oddly, that Red's clothes were wet and blowing, and that it was raining outside.

"Hadn't you better let Linda in, Scoop?" Red asked, mildly, as he came over to Lee. "She's getting kind of upset, seems like."

Red's face was peaceable enough, but he walked with a strange bent-knee shuffle, and his short, squat body slid along the bulkhead, protecting his back. His eyes were very bright, very alert, very watchful as they danced from one of these dangerously quiet men to the other. His gun hung waist-high in his right hand and there was a definite air of readiness about him in spite of his disarming voice.

A new voice entered the room, a scared voice coming from the window. Lee saw one of the stakemen poking his head fretfully into that static-charged cabin.

"Hey, Scoop, come here and look at the barometer! The bottom's dropped out of it, and we just heard over the radio that the supply boat has run aground in the keys and—" The man dragged in a quick breath. "And there's a fast motor boat coming up. Abrams, I guess. Say, what's the matter with Luis? Looks like his throat is torn out of him!"

CHAPTER VIII

CELL

THAT broke the tension into a million bits. Somebody unlocked the door.

Red Malloy, kneeling over Lee, looked up quickly.

"I wouldn't come in, Linda, if I was you," he said, mildly.

The girl hesitated on the threshold. Her eyes were a blue stare of bewilderment.

Lee grabbed Red's arm and pulled himself, dizzily, to a sitting position. Carefully he moved his legs away from Luis Cuesta who, dead, was bleeding all over everything. Swinging his eyes up, he saw Linda standing just inside the door.

Her horrified gaze encompassed him as he tried to get up. She looked incredulously at Scoop who, with blood running down his face from his split scalp, was a pretty nasty sight. Cash Childers, his mouth savagely, bloodily, jerking, was leaning against the wall, looking down at Lee through fanatically hating eyes.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Son," Red said into the thick silence, "you sure play rough when you cut loose."

Scoop found his voice, and it came out in an inhuman snarl. "Linda," he rapped, "get out of this room! If you don't, I'll throw you out."

"You," said Lee, swaying drunkenly, "and who else?"

"Buck!" Red said, in gentle rebuke. "You'll talk yourself into your grave some day."

"And it won't be long, now!" Scoop snarled.

"Give me that gun," Lee said, reaching feebly for Red's automatic, "and I'll clean out the whole bunch of them!"

But Red pulled the gun out of reach. His left arm went around Lee's faintly struggling shoulders.

It steadied Lee—and held him so he couldn't move.

Now, for the first time, those in that shambles of a room noticed the wind. A gust came in through the open window—a short, quick gust, which stirred their clothes and slashed at them with the heavy burden of rain it carried. The barge heeled a little under its pressure and tugged hard against the straining hawsers.

"Better shut that window, somebody," Red said, calmly.

Somebody did, and closed the heavy shutter, too. Scoop Sloper was looking at Red Malloy with strict attention. "Maybe I've been missing a bet," he said in a thoughtful way.

"Yeah," Red said, easily, "I wouldn't wonder if you had."

Now Linda spoke. "Another man dead," she said, tonelessly. "That makes—how many? Isn't there going to be any end to this?"

"Right now there's going to be an end to it," Scoop said. He looked toward the door. Nobody else had noticed that the doorway was now crowded with silent and staring men. "I want a carpenter," he said. "You, Scanlon, come in here. The rest of you, listen. You'll be needed as witnesses. This man Lee murdered the timekeeper last night. We found Lee's bedclothing. He had been hiding the knife under the pillow and—"

Red's face, graver than Lee had ever seen it, turned slowly toward him. There was an expression behind those troubled blue eyes that made Lee ache all over.

"—and the knife edge had cut the sheet and left a stain of blood on it. So that's that. Now he's run amuck and killed Luis Cuesta."

"That's no crime," said a voice from the rear of the listening crowd. "That's just a misdemeanor, like running through a traffic light."

"I'd've killed him myself sooner or later," said someone else.

Somebody even laughed.

"Shut up!" Scoop roared. "Scanlon, board up this window so Lee can't get out. Swaybell, bring me a length of line."

"Scoop!" Linda said, wildly. "Don't you know there's a hurricane coming? What if the barge should sink?"

"HEY, Scoop!" came a hail from the door. "Abrams' boat is coming up under our stern!"

Scoop looked reflectively at Red, who had said nothing but was just standing there, his mild blue eyes focused full on the superintendent. "Am I going to have trouble with you, Red?" Scoop asked, his voice as brittle as slivers of skim ice.

"I don't know," Red said, easily. "Are you?"

"Not much, and that's a promise!"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once again came a short, quick squall. A trickle of rain eased in through the edges of the shutter and ran like a glistening worm down the wall. Scoop eyed it, then turned his gaze upon the uneasy men who surrounded him.

"Blast you!" he snarled at them. "Didn't you hear me? The supply boat isn't coming after us. We've got to ride this out ourselves, and if you don't get busy, there won't be one of us left. Get up on deck and get all the lines fast, or we won't be alive by midnight!"

They herded away in half a panic. The wind squall died down, but the explosive mutter of a motorboat engine could be heard outside.

"We won't tie him," Scoop said at last. "We'll just lock him in here where—"

"No!" Linda cried. "If we should sink—"

"If we should start sinking," Scoop said, easily, "we'll let him out." Now he turned his full attention upon Red. "Are you getting out of this cabin," he demanded harshly, "or do we have our little showdown right now?"

"Sure, I'm getting out," Red said, and took his arm away from Lee's shoulders, and started toward the door. Halfway across the room, he hesitated and looked back at Lee, who was leaning weakly against the wall. "Is that right about the knife, Buck?" he asked, slowly.

Lee was too tired, too filled with pain, too dizzy, to argue. "Yes," he said, dully. "I threw it out the window."

He heard a choked cry from Linda. But he did not want to look at her. He did not want to see the expression that must be on her face.

"Seems funny, Buck," came Red's regretful voice, "that you'd hold out on me like that."

He stood there a moment wavering, hoping a little that Marvin Lee might have something to say for himself. But Lee didn't speak.

"Well, I guess," Malloy said, slowly and heavily as if his words came from a throat almost too tired to speak, "I guess that's that."

Linda's white hand fluttered upward in a vague gesture.

And then Red was gone. Linda was gone. The others were filing slowly out of the room and he was alone with Scoop. Scoop put his hard face very close.

"Listen, rat," he said in a voice that shook with hate. "We're going to lock the door. The first time we see you sticking your head outside, I'll blast the living heart right out of you."

"Coming, Scoop?" asked Red's gloomy voice from the doorway.

Scoop stiffened. He wiped a creeping line of blood from his chin. His gray eye was aflame with fury. Lee tried to gather his tired muscles together to protect himself from what he dully thought must be coming—and soon.

But Red's voice interrupted and Scoop turned away.

"Scoop," said Red again, "coming? I'm waiting for you."

The strain went out of Scoop's body. Without another word to Buck he strode out of the room. Lee, leaning sickly, dizzily, against the wall, heard the door close and the key turn in the lock. Staggering, he walked over to the lower bunk and let himself fall into it. And then, relaxed, he felt pain approach from a distance and pounce upon him.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Venus de Malibu

By DALE CLARK

Author of "A Racket in Blondes," "Reader, I Killed Him," etc.

"LISTEN, Bell! I'm doing you a favor!"

"Oh, no, Cheeky. The favor's all mine."

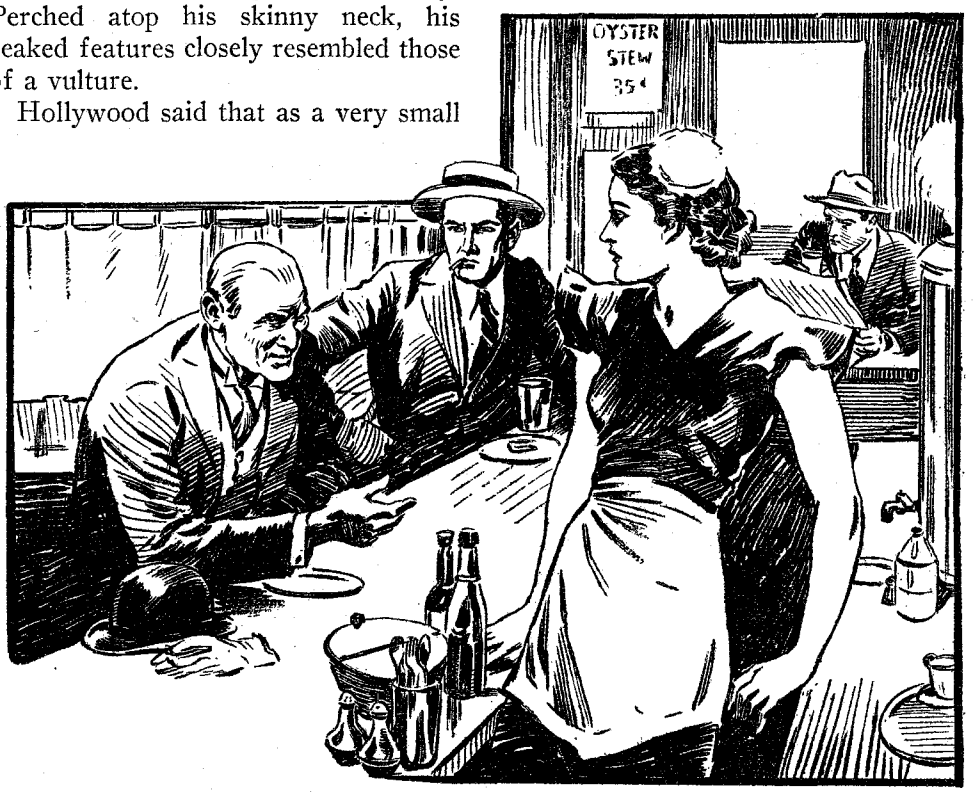
J. Edwin Bell stared suspiciously through his monocle at Cheeky Witherspool, and Cheeky blinked uneasily behind his horn-rimmed cheaters. Each wondered if—by some mistake—he really *was* giving the other a break. They studied one another.

J. Edwin was a long, stooped, silver-haired example of what the well dressed Hollywoodite will wear. Mr. Bell wore excellent clothes and a monocle in order to distract attention from his face. His face was a warning to the wary. Perched atop his skinny neck, his beaked features closely resembled those of a vulture.

Hollywood said that as a very small boy J. Edwin Bell had believed in Santa Claus, so he'd set a bear trap in the chimney.

On the other hand, Cheeky Witherspool had never believed in Jolly Saint Nick at all—but if so, a bear trap would not have been in his line. Indeed not. Cheeky would have set out poison.

Cheeky was a fat and youthful man. He might have been thirty, but looked both younger and fatter than he really was, encased in a tight, sporty checked suit. Under his double chin, a weird tie poured a Pacific sunset into his bulging vest. On his stubby fingers glistened an array of diamonds that never knew



PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kimberly. His lapel sported a gardenia only slightly smaller than a sunflower.

He looked too well fed, too soft. But the glint in Cheeky's pale eyes told a different story. His eyes were cuneiform and shifty and—greedy.

J. Edwin Bell saw all these things, and he said warily:

"It's easy to figure what you get out of this deal! You want the use of a beautiful red-headed girl free for nothing—which otherwise would cost you the regular rates. But where does the favor to me come in at?"

Mr. Bell spoke in chill, businesslike tones. Girls—beautiful girls—brought no stir whatsoever in his frigid veins. He handled them like so much salt or tea or sugar. They were just merchandise to be retailed on a commission basis.

For J. Edwin was a flesh peddler, a cinema agent, placing actors and actresses in the movie studios.

Cheeky smiled blandly. Likewise were girls, beautiful girls, a matter of business with him. Cheeky was a puff artist, or, in other words, a press agent. He got notices into the papers without benefit of the advertising rates. And he had learned that the easiest of all things to get into the newspapers is the picture of a luscious young woman.

Cheeky made a specialty of handling publicity for manufacturing companies. He had puffed carpenter tools, safety matches, boxing gloves, and canned asparagus—always tying up his publicity with a fair lovely. The connection between canned asparagus and a girl might not be quite clear, but Cheeky found it duck soup: he just photographed the girl dancing in a hula skirt made of the vegetable stalks. His last job had been with a freight steamship line, but in that case the tie-up slipped. It literally slipped, letting a burlesque chorus who were being photographed on a dock crane go *splash* into San Francisco bay. . . .

The resulting lawsuits cost the steamship company fifty thousand dollars, and of course cost Cheeky his job.

NOW, arrived in Hollywood, Cheeky had some kind of a connection with the Fireside Radio Company. J. Edwin Bell didn't understand it exactly, but it seemed this company was holding a national convention of its dealers. Naturally they wanted to get as much free advertising out of the convention as they could, and so they'd hired Cheeky Witherspool.

Cheeky planned to work as usual—with a girl.

And, to save the expense of actually hiring a model, he schemed to use one of Mr. Bell's clients. In fact, he had promised to secure a motion picture actress to appear as "queen of the convention." (An actress, as Cheeky used the term, meant any girl who had worked for even a single day as an extra.)

J. Edwin Bell did not know all this, but he could pretty well guess it. "Why?" demanded J. Edwin. "Why should I fix you up with a girl for nothing?"

Cheeky knew no good reason, but naturally he didn't admit this. He said persuasively, "The girl's going to get just as much publicity as the Fireside Radio folks, and they're paying for it. She'll get her name and pictures in all the papers. Why, she ought to jump at it."

Mr. Bell sniffed. "Baloney! And besides, what's there in it for me?"

"Well, ain't you handling her?" demanded Cheeky. "Suppose some big motion picture director sees her picture in the paper, and decides to hire

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the girl? Wouldn't that be sweet for you?"

"Don't make me laugh," cried J. Edwin, uttering a laugh which sounded like stones rattling in his skinny throat. "They ain't hiring nobody any more—except foreign stars. Like that Argentine hash-slinger Gus Lennox just hired for Mogul Films!"

Evidently J. Edwin Bell felt strongly about this, for he continued in a mournful vein, "How they expect us local agents to live, I dunno."

Of course it was possible that the movie companies did not care whether Mr. Bell lived or not, but Cheeky did not deem it wise to say so.

Instead he remarked thoughtfully, "When business is bad, Bell, the smart man puts up an ad. In other words, what you need is a little publicity! You get me this girl, and I'll sneak your name into these newspaper stories."

J. Edwin's optic concentrated behind its monocle. After all, he reflected rapidly, why not? The publicity might not help much, but it wouldn't cost him a dime. The actual work would be performed by a red-headed girl he had in mind. As she wasn't working, he wouldn't lose even a day's commission by the deal.

In short, it smelled like gravy, and when the gravy was passed around Mr. Bell generally managed to be right in line with his spoon.

He said, "Wel-l-l, I'll send a girl to your office in the morning—but only as a personal favor to you."

"Send her early in the morning," emphasized Cheeky as he waddled to the door. "I got a photographer coming at eight, and I don't want him doing nothing on *my* time."

Mr. Bell nodded; early morning suited him fine—so long as he did not have to hurry his breakfast. As soon as Cheeky Witherspool had vanished, he picked up his phone and told the switchboard girl:

"Get me Guinevere Geary."

MISS GEARY—better known as Gin Geary—was the red-headed extra, and J. Edwin's voice became enthusiastic as he chatted into the phone. To hear him tell it, anyone would have thought he'd planned the whole idea, and chased all over Hollywood to land this opportunity for the young woman. He concluded triumphantly, "Your name in all the papers! Wouldn't you like to clip out the pictures and send them to your friends back in Oklahoma?"

"Well, it's an idea," came the redhead's rejoinder. "Anyway, I'll toddle over to Witherfool's office in the A. M."

"Witherspool," corrected Mr. Bell.

And thereupon he hung up, and his busy brain went to thinking its devious thoughts. Mr. Bell's thinking always went the long way around, but the answer always came out the same place—namely, out of somebody else's pocketbook.

A day and a half later, J. Edwin was engrossed in his ideas when suddenly a vigorous hand slapped the monocle out of his eye, and an even more vigorous voice jangled against his eardrums.

"You old turkey buzzard!" the voice exclaimed. "Why didn't you tell me it'd turn out like this? Fat agent you are!"

Mr. Bell was far from fat, but as he peered up into the flushed face of the young woman he decided not to argue the point. Miss Guinevere Geary's face was, in fact, almost as bright as her very red hair.

Incidentally, she was not merely a red-head but also a big one—Nature

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had not spared the curves in shaping Miss Geary. Behind her doubled fist stood about a hundred and forty pounds of healthy womanhood. And it looked like she would not mind parking the fist, and the poundage behind it, right smack on J. Edwin's beaked nose.

So Mr. Bell spoke softly. "My dear, what's the matter?"

"Matter! Look at this! And this! And this!"

She slapped the newspapers on the desk, one—two—three, as she spoke. J. Edwin Bell fumbled with his monocle, and headlines swam into focus. He was also vaguely aware of pictures exhibiting a young woman clad in not much of a bathing suit—about half enough bathing suit to plug a keyhole.

The first of the papers had the picture captioned,

Venus of Air Waves Tries the Wet Waves

Queen of Fireside Convention Samples Malibu Surf.

In the second paper, the same scantily clad young woman held a tape measure around her waist—

How Radio Venus Compares With De Milo One.

The De Milo one, Mr. Bell judged, was the statue minus arms down in the corner of the page.

While the third paper—a tabloid—sported the following caption:

How Would You Like to Tune in on This, Boys? Radio Venus Shows the Latest in Ten Tube Parlor Sets!

And here the picture displayed the young woman holding up her ten fingers with a radio tube on each—the rest of the costume consisting of a few strands of wire.

Mr. Bell blinked, and said, "How distressing! I didn't know Witherspool meant to go quite this far!"

The girl gave a jeering laugh. "You didn't know! You didn't know that Gus Lennox would offer that girl a job, either! Did you?"

THIS certainly was news to J. Edwin Bell. Recently Mr. Bell had experienced a little difficulty with the great Gus Lennox. So much that Lennox had cancelled a standing order to have the flesh broker shown the door when he called—the new order being to throw him right through the door.

So he gasped, "Gus Lennox—offered you—a job—?"

The red-headed girl gave a most unladylike Bronx cheer. "Me? Say, you featherless old vulture, fix that glass eye of yours on them pictures again, and this time look at the *face!*"

J. Edwin had, in fact, overlooked this detail. Now he bent over and scrutinized the newspapers closely. And a groan escaped his thin, tense lips.

For—these were not pictures of Guinevere Geary! They were pictures of a perfect stranger!

And it was this perfect stranger that Gus Lennox wanted to hire!

Mr. Bell slowly formed a question. "What—what happened?"

"Oh, it's simple enough," growled Miss Geary. "I and the boy-friend went out on a part the night before. So, heck, I didn't feel like getting up at seven bells. I had my room-mate go and pose for me. Not knowing a movie job would come out of it!"

"Your room-mate? The girl you share your apartment with?" asked J. Edwin Bell, stalling for time.

"Naturally!" snapped Miss Geary. "Merion Miles, that's the name."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

J. Edwin Bell could think rapidly on occasion; but this time he did not even have to think half fast. Obviously there was only one thing to do. He had to get hold of this girl—this Merion Miles—and sign her to a contract. Thereafter he would be entitled to ten per cent of her salary just so long as she worked for Mogul Films.

He said, "Hmmm. Does she—er—know of her good fortune yet?"

"No. She works in one of those chicken shacks down Malibu Beach way," replied the red-head. "Mr. Lennox just telephoned the apartment, and I came right over here to tell you. Because you promised that Witherfool would take my picture for the papers—and now I want him to! I want it understood that I'm the real queen of the convention!"

This somewhat startling idea did not impress Mr. Bell at all. He scarcely heard the suggestion.

"Which chicken shack?" he inquired.

"The *Happy Roost,*" replied Miss Geary. "You'll tell Witherfool about the mistake, won't you?"

Miss Geary seemed to labor under the impression that Gus Lennox would offer her a job, too, if she just got her picture in the newspapers. J. Edwin Bell did not pause to correct the impression.

"I'm going as fast as a cab will carry me!" he replied, hastily cramming a derby onto his skull and bolting out of the office.

HE went as fast as a cab would carry him—to the *Happy Roost* chicken barbecue stand. This cab trip cost a pretty penny, too. But Mr. Bell never grudged spending a dollar which might bring home a hundred of its brothers. . . .

Having fortified himself with the newspapers en route, he had no trouble identifying Miss Merion Miles—a slim, dark, impetuous-eyed girl behind the counter. She wore a white apron, prettily moulding her figure, and a white cap was jaunty on top of her lustrous hair.

Mr. Bell hailed her with a "Hello, Good-Looking, and how's it for a cupacawfee?"

For, not being a sap, he did not intend to break the news that Mogul Films meant to sign her for a movie role. If she knew that, why should she cut him in for ten per cent?

Therefore he screwed the monocle into his eye, and studied her; then he said in a tone of feigned surprise:

"Uh-h, say! Didn't I see your picture in the paper today?"

Miss Merion Miles slammed a cup of scalding, black coffee in front of the flesh peddler. A flush climbed in her cheeks and she replied stiffly, "Those pictures were retouched. I don't know how they do it, but I don't really go around clad in glass tubes and two yards of wire, if that's what's on your mind."

J. Edwin Bell failed to notice the indignation in her voice.

"You know," he observed glibly, "you're pretty enough to be in the movies. Really you are."

This remark caused a young man whose muscular figure wore natty flannels to turn and stare down the counter at J. Edwin Bell.

"Worm!" the young man muttered.

But all Mr. Bell heard was the girl's, "What'll you have besides coffee?"

The agent's lips curled into the leer which he fondly imagined could pass for a smile. "Listen, young lady! I think maybe I could get you into the movies. You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Possibly the girl had heard this be-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fore; she shrugged. "Why don't you wise guys think up something new for a change?"

"I mean it," protested J. Edwin. He fished an agency contract from his pocket. "Here, put your name on this!"

Her dark eyes viewed him quizzically. "I suppose you want my telephone number on that, too?"

J. Edwin answered, "Yes," as he did not feel it was necessary to explain that he already had the girls' apartment phone number.

Whereupon the young man in flannels climbed to his feet. He said, "Fresh guy! All he wants for his nickel is a cup of coffee and a date with the waitress, huh?"

His left hand shot out and caught J. Edwin Bell by the collar of his well-tailored coat. He lifted Mr. Bell some six inches from the counter stool; then his right hand found a grip on the seat of the agent's trousers.

Miss Merion Miles uttered a faint cry of alarm. Her voice was scarcely heard: her cry of "Mr. Pembroke!" being drowned in a sea of sulphurous comment shouted by J. Edwin Bell. The flesh broker kicked and squirmed and writhed.

Much good it did him.

PUSHING the door open, the flannel-clad Mr. Pembroke swung J. Edwin Bell to and fro several times, and then he threw the flesh broker quite a distance down the road. If Mr. Bell could have sailed through the air like that alone, he could easily have created a sensation at the Olympic Games. Indeed, he could have added several feet to the broad-jump record, even though his landing technique needed improvement. It lacked grace, and also was hard on the rear of his fashionable pants. . . .

Pembroke dusted off his hands. "Let that be a lesson to you! A guy your age trying to pick up young girls! Next time I'll throw you out on your head!"

There was not going to be any next time, Mr. Bell resolved as he climbed painfully to his patent-leather feet. He fully intended to sign up Miss Merion Miles, but not until that young man had gone away.

So the agent made his way to some nearby bushes and hid himself there. Gently he massaged the wounded portion of his anatomy. Sadly he waited until fifteen minutes wore on into half an hour.

"Is that guy *still* eating chicken? I hope he grows feathers!"

As this savage comment formed on J. Edwin's lips, a roadster braked in front of the *Happy Roost*. The agent stared through his monocle in astonishment, for out of the roadster came none other than Mr. Cheeky Witherspool.

Instinctively, J. Edwin Bell shrank deeper into the bushes. A frown of puzzlement grew on his vulture-like features as he watched Cheeky Witherspool enter the barbecue palace.

In much less than a minute, the door flew open again. There stood young Pembroke, clutching Cheeky exactly as he had clutched J. Edwin Bell.

Mr. Bell watched with fascinated interest, somewhat like a movie player watching a film in which he himself has played a leading part.

The young man in flannels swung Cheeky Witherspool to and fro, and released him. A confused ball of brightly checked garments came flying through the ozone. Cheeky failed by several yards to hit J. Edwin Bell's record mark. But this was probably on account of the press agent's greater weight, and not due to any lack of enthusiasm on Pembroke's part.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dusting off his hands, Pembroke called: "That'll teach you not to have most of the clothes retouched off a girl's picture!"

The door slammed, and J. Edwin Bell came out of the bushes as jauntily as he could.

"Well, well, well," he mused. "What seems to be the trouble, Cheeky?"

Being far better cushioned than the extremely thin J. Edwin, Cheeky managed to survive the incident without serious hurt. He got up, stuffing the Pacific sunset necktie inside his checkerboard vest.

He showed no surprise on discovering Mr. Bell on the scene. "I thought I'd find you inside there," he growled. "Did that Hercules throw you out, too?"

Mr. Bell denied it.

"Oh, yeah?" jeered Cheeky. "I suppose you were just hunting Easter eggs in the bushes? Don't kid me, old boy! That Geary dame spilled the works, see?"

"That Geary dame—?" faltered Mr. Bell.

"Yeah. She came to my office, and told me all about how Gus Lennox wanted to hire Merion Miles. So naturally I called Mogul Films, and it seems this girl is practically a dead ringer for Tessa Lassa—"

"The Argentine actress!"

"Sure," continued Cheeky, "and they want to use Merion for a double or stand-in or something. Anyhow they'll pay two hundred a week."

J. EDWIN BELL digested this, figuring that two hundred a week would yield him twenty—not bad, if he got it without effort.

Cheeky grinned. "That isn't my racket, so I thought maybe you'd like to buy the release from me!"

Behind its monocle, Mr. Bell's eye sharpened. "What release?"

"Why, naturally," purred the fat publicity man, "I had her sign a release, like all commercial models do. Only this release of mine has a peculiar clause in it. Read it!"

J. Edwin accepted a document from the other's plump fingers. His eye raced down the page. The clause, printed in very small type at the foot of the agreement, certainly had its features.

"Why, this is an outrage!" spluttered the agent. "It's—it's a crime! That girl couldn't have known what she was signing."

A grin spread on Cheeky's moonlike face. "It's a contract," he pointed out, "and how well you know it! Gus Lennox or nobody else can use this girl in pictures—still or moving—without my consent. Get wise, Bell! Then we can go ahead, and maybe I can do you a favor."

"A—a favor—?"

"Yeah. A big favor. I mean, Bell, I could sign this release over to you. For a fair price, of course."

"A—fair—price—" and J. Edwin Bell reflected fast. He would certainly like to be in a position to do business with Gus Lennox again—and make Gus like it! For hiring a double for a star was—well, ticklish. Doubles don't grow on bushes. Probably Merion Miles was the only girl in the world closely resembling this Argentine actress.

He said, "Well, what would you call a fair price?"

"One G," pronounced Cheeky. "One grand. One thousand bucks, if you get what I mean."

Mr. Bell's vulturelike face froze in horror, and a moan trickled through his clenched lips.

"A thousand—why, that's a whole

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

year's commission at ten per cent!"

"Take it or leave it," growled the fat young man.

"But I can't—it's a hold-up—"

"Okay!" and Cheeky turned toward his roadster. "I'll deal with Lennox myself."

"Wait," panted J. Edwin Bell. "I—oh, give me that paper! I'll write you a check."

"No, you won't. You'll go to the bank and draw out the cash. I'll sign over the release when I get the mazuma, and not before."

Pale-faced, his eyes bleak and black with indignation, Mr. Bell got into the roadster; his movements hinted of secret pain inside him. In fact, he might have been getting into a dentist's chair, the way he acted.

Cheeky plunked into the car and proceeded to drive very fast, as if afraid that J. Edwin might change his mind. . . .

ONE hour later, poorer by a thousand dollars, but with the release snugly in his pocket, J. Edwin Bell appeared at the Mogul Films lot. Having a general pass, he got as far as the outermost reception office. Here he wrote a note, and folded it inside a five dollar bill. After talking to three of the pages, he learned that Gus Lennox was out of his office for a moment, and—for five dollars—the third boy consented to risk putting the note on the producer's desk.

Then, hiding his face behind a newspaper, Mr. Bell sank back into a lounge and relaxed and dreamed pleasant dreams.

Suddenly a crass voice boomed, shattering his meditations. Looking up, he saw Gus Lennox in the doorway. Gus Lennox was small and brown and shriveled, and also one of the most important executives in the industry. His importance was well matched by his temper. Gus Lennox, when he really turned it on, was only slightly less violent than an earthquake.

At the moment, a deceptive grin played upon his wrinkled features.

"So?" the producer muttered softly. "So it's Bell come here again? It's a pleasure, Bell. It's a personal pleasure with me—" and his face changed, his voice lashed "—to tell you to go to blazes!"

Springing to his feet, J. Edwin waved his skinny hands. "Wait, Mr. Lennox! Wait until you've read my note—"

"Your note?" scored the great man. "Listen, faker! Such a note as you put on my desk, it only shows you're crazy in the head besides being crookeder than a corkscrew!"

J. Edwin Bell felt something like the reception floor melting away under his soles. "You mean—you don't want—Merion Miles—?"

"No! I don't want her! I never even heard of her! Furthermore and besides," shouted Lennox, "I wouldn't hire from you Mickey Mouse—if you had Mickey Mouse, which you ain't!"

"There's been a mistake—a dreadful mistake," faltered the flesh broker.

"Get out before there's another mistake," stormed Gus Lennox. "Before by accident I put my foot on you, you wormer!"

J. Edwin Bell got out. Looking as miserable as a man can look in the mild California sunshine, he staggered to the cabstand in front of the big gates.

So pale was he that the alarmed cabbie gasped, "Which hospital, boss?"

Mr. Bell groaned, "I belong in the Home for the Feeble-Minded!" For he saw it all now. That telephone call to Guinevere Geary—Cheeky had framed it. But could it be proved? Not much!

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He'd been rooked of a thousand dollars—

J. Edwin Bell started to crush the release in furious fingers, then instead he gave it a monocled stare.

He yelled at the cabbie, "Stop at the next drugstore!"

J. EDWIN BELL, as he himself said, had won wars before after losing the first battle. Now he rushed into the drugstore, and inserted his thin form into a phone booth. Among the actors on his list of clients was a chap named Sam Sunday—and Sam Sunday's favorite role, when he got a role, was that of a hard-cracking city dick. . . .

"Sam!" barked Mr. Bell into the phone. "I got a job for you."

The more he explained, the less Sam liked it. "That's impersonating a cop. They could send me up for that," came his protest.

"Fifty dollars," promised J. Edwin Bell.

Mr. Bell, though he had lost his childhood faith in Santa, still believed implicitly in bear traps.

By the time J. Edwin got back to his office, he had callers. One—Sam Sunday—looked very tough under the snapped-down brim of his fedora. The other was Cheeky Witherspool, and all the color in Cheeky's plump face seemed to have drained down into his necktie.

J. Edwin Bell adjusted his monocle and gave Cheeky a piercing stare.

"I got a different favor to ask this time," he grated. "How about doing five years breaking stones in the pen for me?"

"You can't get away with this," Cheeky spoke somewhat worriedly. "You can't prove a thing against me, not a thing."

Sam Sunday sneered, "Awh, tell that to the judge!" in a voice which caused the plump publicity man to wilt visibly.

J. Edwin twiddled his monocle. "I can prove more than you think, Cheeky. Remember, I'm representing Merion Miles now! You photographed her, and then published the picture in such a way as to cause her to incur humiliation, grief, and cruel mental suffering. That's against the California law. Ain't it, officer?"

"General Statutes, Section 428-b!" rapped Sam Sunday. "One to fifteen years at hard labor!"

Cheeky protested, "But I got a release!"

"You *had* a release," corrected the flesh broker. "You ain't got it now, have you? Cheeky, suppose I stepped over to the window and tore up a certain piece of paper—?"

Large beads of sweat dotted the other's broad, pale face. His pulpy hands squeezed into agonized fists. His stare rolled uneasily to the fiercely scowling Sam Sunday.

Mr. Bell nodded his vulturelike head vigorously. "That's the spot you're on, Cheeky! This Section 428-b was enacted specially to protect girls against fly-by-nighters who make shameful pictures, and yet haven't got a dime so the girl can sue them. That's why it's a criminal offense. And it's *plenty* criminal—the way judges look at it. You'd get five years at least—unless you had a release to protect yourself—"

Sam Sunday growled, "The picture was retouched, wasn't it! That makes it a malicious action besides, contrary to Section 529—so he could get three years more!"

Sam Sunday slapped a meaty hand on Cheeky's shoulder as he uttered the threat.

"Wait!" shuddered the publicity

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

man. "I—I'll buy back that release. I—I'll give you five hundred for it."

"Five hundred?" sneered J. Edwin Bell.

"It's all I got left. I had to settle an overdraft at the bank."

J. Edwin Bell frowned behind his monocle. Only five hundred—but suppose it really was all Cheeky had? Besides, Sam Sunday couldn't actually jerk the fat fellow off to jail. Sections 428-b and 529, Mr. Bell remembered thoughtfully, existed only in his own imagination.

So he stretched forth his hand. "Give me!"

Whereupon three things happened at once. The telephone began to ring, Cheeky emptied his wallet, and J. Edwin Bell surrendered the release. Cannily sweeping the banknotes into his pocket, the flesh broker lifted the phone in a skinny hand.

A FAMILIAR voice fairly buttered his ear drum, so soft it was. "Hello, Bell? Say, Bell, have a cigar—oh, I forgot you ain't here beside me. Well, come on over right away—I'll save the cigar for you."

An incoherent mumble formed in J. Edwin's throat. He licked his lips, and the monocled eye became positively glassy. . . .

The voice — Gus Lennox's voice!—continued blandly: "You ain't holding my little joke against me, are you? I was only joking, you know. Ha-ha!"

J. Edwin Bell muttered a feeble, "Ha-ha!"

"Because after you left, I took a good look at that picture in the paper, and you're right!" Gus Lennox was saying. "That girl of yours is positively a dead ringer for my new Argentine star! I checked on that, because about six months ago Merion Miles had a screen test made here—I'm right now out of the projection room, Bell, and besides the cigar I got a three hundred dollar a week contract on my desk for you."

"I—I'll come right over!" gasped J. Edwin Bell.

The phone clattered into its cradle, and Mr. Bell stared numbly at Cheeky Witherspool. Cheeky was slowly stuffing the release into his checkered coat.

Mr. Bell shivered. His voice rose barely to a whisper:

"Wait—wait a minute, Cheeky. I—I—I don't want to be too hard on you. A guy has to live, don't I know it? I—now I'll do you a favor. We won't carry this joke any farther. A deal is a deal, and you can have back the five hundred dollars. Just give me the release—"

Cheeky stared, wide-eyed. "So you can slap me into the hoosegow?"

"No-o. This affair here is just a little joke. Sam isn't really a cop—are you, Sam?"

"Nope," grinned the actor with evident relief. "It's like he says, a practical joke, Mr. Witherspool."

Cheeky's eyes began to narrow. Color returned to his face, and his brilliant vest expanded again.

He said with a grin:

"I like jokes, too. But I ain't joking when I say that the price of this release is the same as before—one thousand bucks!"

J. Edwin Bell recoiled. His thin lips grimaced, as if he had recently taken a large tablespoonful of castor oil. His Adam's apple jogged up and down in his throat—it looked like he couldn't swallow the castor oil.

"A—another thousand?" he faltered. "Hell, I won't pay it!"

Cheeky shrugged his plump shoulders. "The price will be *two* thousand tomorrow." He peered at the strap-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

watch on his pudgy wrist. "The banks will be closing in about seven minutes. You got that long to decide."

EXACTLY six and one-half minutes later, J. Edwin Bell stood in the attitude of a collapsed scarecrow in front of the teller's window at his bank. He was drawing out an additional five hundred dollars—

"Plus fifty for me!" muttered Sam Sunday, at his elbow. "Don't forget that."

There was little chance that Mr. Bell would forget any of it. A black scowl hung over his features as he strode out of the bank, for he was adding up the first thousand this release had cost him, plus the additional five hundred, plus Sunday's fifty, plus cab fares, plus the wear and tear on his clothes—

And he hadn't finished spending money, even yet. There was still cab fare to and from the *Happy Roost,* because he had to get Merion Miles to Gus Lennox's office right away.

It would be a year before he could cash in on his investment in this girl, and even at that he'd have to book her on an unusual fifty-week contract.

So Mr. Bell consoled himself with the thought of the second year. He knew that the Argentine star had been signed on a three year basis, so her double and stand-in ought to rate at least that long a contract.

"Anyhow," he reflected, "it gets me back on good terms with Mogul Films. That would be worth plenty, even if I never made a dime out of the deal itself."

Somewhat consoled, the flesh broker journeyed along the Malibu road to the chicken barbecue palace. But it is true that he missed most of the scenery along the way; Mr. Bell, when he took a cab, had eyes only for the meter.

Leaving both the scenery and the hateful meter behind him, the flesh broker strode into the barbecue establishment. His stride, however, changed to a hop-step-and-jump as he glimpsed a young man in white flannels at the end of the counter. Apparently the guy must be connected with the joint in some way—its manager, maybe.

The white flanneled chap started forward when he saw Mr. Bell, but J. Edwin's hop-step-and-jump carried him to at least momentary safety behind a table. The flesh broker raised a shaking, skinny hand.

"Stop!" he gusted hoarsely, while his monocled eye darted a glance along the counter and located Miss Merion Miles. "You got me wrong! I'm no masher! I got an honest to gosh job in the movies for this young lady—at Mogul Films!"

Pembroke's flanneled figure came to a halt. Both he and J. Edwin Bell stared at the girl behind the counter. She was well worth staring at. A tremulous smile played on her lips, and her eyes were misty with happiness.

She said, "But I don't want a job in the movies!"

J. EDWIN BELL reeled, both hands gripping the table for support. His face seemed to grow about six inches longer and the monocle spilled from his eye. The optic thus uncovered wore a dead, glassy gloss resembling that of a fish caught two days ago.

He sputtered, "You don't—nonsense! Every girl wants a movie job! Any girl in the country would jump at the chance!" His whirling brain seized on one solid fact. "If you don't want a job, why did you take that screen test at Mogul?"

Miss Merion Miles laughed softly.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Oh, that was six months ago! I did want a movie job then, because I'd just come to Hollywood. I'm from Kansas City, you see?"

J. Edwin Bell didn't see what that had to do with it, and he said so.

"Why, it's very simple," the dark-eyed girl smiled. "The Fireside Radio Company is in Kansas City, too. Mr. Pembroke works for the company—his dad owns the company. We've known each other all our lives, but we had a quarrel—"

"Merion left home, and I didn't know where to find her again," supplied the young man.

"Until he came to this convention, and there was my picture in the papers," said Miss Merion Miles.

"We patched up the quarrel," concluded the flannel-clad youth, "and we're going to get married! Right away! So naturally Merion couldn't accept a movie job."

J. Edwin Bell just stood there and stared into space. His lips moved mechanically, forming a sound vaguely like, "Fifteen hundred and fifty bucks!"

Miss Merion Miles chirped a happy little laugh. "Isn't it wonderful! And the most wonderful thing is that I didn't really realize I loved Pemmy at all—until I saw him throw you men out today."

"So we really owe you a lot of thanks!" beamed the young man. "Listen! I'm renting a plane to fly to Yuma for the wedding. We'd like to take you along—to show you how grateful we are. And besides, you could act as a witness during the ceremony. You'd be doing us a favor."

J. Edwin Bell stiffened. "Did you say a—a favor?"

There was a thud, followed by a rattle of silverware as the tablecloth followed Mr. Bell to the floor and gently swathed his recumbent form.

The pretty girl behind the counter gasped: "My goodness gracious! The poor man fainted away when you said that!"

Shock Company

THERE isn't a company called Electric Eels, Inc., yet, but there may be one any minute now—just as soon as some embryo utilities magnate gets around to acting on the facts supplied by an expedition just back from Para, Brazil.

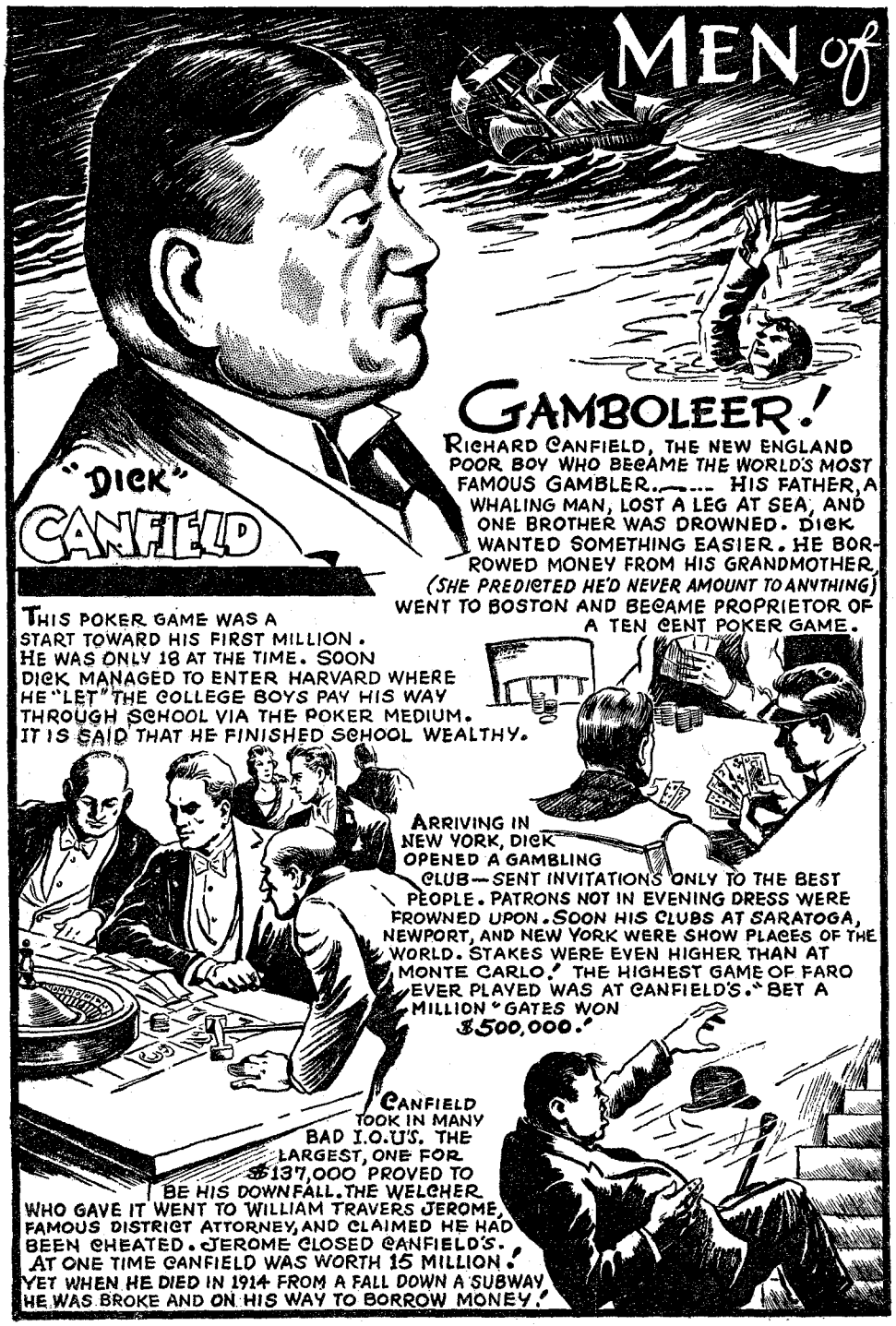
This expedition, financed by the New York Aquarium and Dr. H. B. Baruch, returned to Manhattan recently with a tank full of electric eels. According to the scientists, who kept a careful record of their charges' discharges, an average Brazilian electric eel will furnish an impulse of from 110 to 500 volts. Natives along the Orinoco and Amazon rivers fear these slippery, high-tension creatures as much as they do the kings of the jungle.

Nobody seems to have found out what makes the eels like this, but it was discovered that a positive charge is emitted from the head while the one from the tail is stingingly negative.

Certainly some unsung mechanical genius will discover how to harness this untrammeled power so that electric lights will presently come to just the monthly upkeep of one lively, dynamic eel.

—*Harold Ledbetter*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED


MEN of
"DICK"
CANFIELD
GAMBOLEER!
RICHARD CANFIELD, THE NEW ENGLAND POOR BOY WHO BECAME THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS GAMBLER..... HIS FATHER, A WHALING MAN, LOST A LEG AT SEA, AND ONE BROTHER WAS DROWNED. DICK WANTED SOMETHING EASIER. HE BORROWED MONEY FROM HIS GRANDMOTHER (SHE PREDICTED HE'D NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING) WENT TO BOSTON AND BECAME PROPRIETOR OF A TEN CENT POKER GAME.
THIS POKER GAME WAS A START TOWARD HIS FIRST MILLION. HE WAS ONLY 18 AT THE TIME. SOON DICK MANAGED TO ENTER HARVARD WHERE HE "LET" THE COLLEGE BOYS PAY HIS WAY THROUGH SCHOOL VIA THE POKER MEDIUM. IT IS SAID THAT HE FINISHED SCHOOL WEALTHY.
ARRIVING IN NEW YORK, DICK OPENED A GAMBLING CLUB—SENT INVITATIONS ONLY TO THE BEST PEOPLE. PATRONS NOT IN EVENING DRESS WERE FROWNED UPON. SOON HIS CLUBS AT SARATOGA, NEWPORT, AND NEW YORK WERE SHOW PLACES OF THE WORLD. STAKES WERE EVEN HIGHER THAN AT MONTE CARLO! THE HIGHEST GAME OF FARO EVER PLAYED WAS AT CANFIELD'S. BET A MILLION "GATES WON $500,000.!
CANFIELD TOOK IN MANY BAD I.O.U'S. THE LARGEST, ONE FOR $137,000 PROVED TO BE HIS DOWNFALL. THE WELCHER WHO GAVE IT WENT TO WILLIAM TRAVERS JEROME, FAMOUS DISTRICT ATTORNEY, AND CLAIMED HE HAD BEEN CHEATED. JEROME CLOSED CANFIELD'S. AT ONE TIME CANFIELD WAS WORTH 15 MILLION! YET WHEN HE DIED IN 1914 FROM A FALL DOWN A SUBWAY HE WAS BROKE AND ON HIS WAY TO BORROW MONEY!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DARING
by STOKIE ALLEN
"BET A MILLION"
MOST COLORFUL OF ALL CANFIELD'S PATRONS— HE OFTEN BET A MILLION ON A SINGLE EVENT! BORN OF POOR PARENTS IN ILLINOIS HE BECAME THE EMBODIMENT OF WESTERN RUSH AND SAUCY DISREGARD OF THE OTHER FELLOW'S OPINION.
JOHN W. GATES
WHETHER DEALING WITH BOOKIES, FINANCIERS, OR SPORTSMEN WHO THOUGHT THEY COULD SHOOT BETTER THAN HE, GATES WANTED HIS MONEY TO DO HIS TALKING.
HE GOT HIS START BY INVENTING AND MANUFACTURING A BARBED WIRE THAT HELD BOISTEROUS TEXAS CATTLE.
GATES AMASSED A FORTUNE WITH HIS BARBED WIRE AND SOON BECAME ONE OF THE MOST SPECTACULAR FIGURES THAT EVER GRACED THE SPORTING CAPITALS. THE BOY FROM ILLINOIS WOULD GAMBLE ON ANYTHING. HE CORNERED THE WALL STREET MARKET AND BROKE THE BOOKIES AND GAMING TABLES COUNTLESS TIMES.
ONCE WHILE RIDING ON A TRAIN HE BET $50,000 ON A RAINDROP RUNNING DOWN A WINDOW!
IN ENGLAND HE WON $475,000 ON A SINGLE HORSE RACE! (1900). GATES LOST $400,000 AT SARATOGA TO ONE BOOKIE ALONE, THEN WON IT BACK THAT NIGHT PLAYING FARO! WHENEVER HE ENTERED A GAMBLING CLUB WORD WOULD BE SENT OUT AND MEN WHO WANTED TO HAZARD THEIR MONEY WOULD ARRIVE BY THE DOZENS—THEY KNEW THE SKY WOULD BE THE LIMIT! YET AFTER ALL HIS LUCK, HE DIED IN 1911 WITH ONLY $30,000.

Next Week: Walter Hinton—Front-Page Flyer

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The man leaped straight for Darrell, his knife poised

The Smoking Land

By GEORGE CHALLIS

FAR to the north of any civilization, locked in the jaws of the glaciers of the Ice Pole region, lies the mysterious, unknown island called the Smoking Land. For two bitter years Smoky Cassidy had sought in vain for a trace of it, restlessly occupied with the quest to which he had devoted his life—the search for his missing friend, the scientist Cleveland Darrell. And then for eight months, having learned where it might be found, he had journeyed over the frozen, berg-locked sea until he had reached the island where time was dead.

A strange and terrible place it was. The people dressed in the garb of sixteenth century England, and spoke the archaic tongue. But in the subterranean caverns where they lived, there was electricity, machine-power, and scientific progress advanced to an unheard-of degree.

FROM Sylvia, priestess of the nameless goddess, Smoky learns that the wise men who live in the core of the flaming mountain can tell him about Cleve Darrell. She offers to lead him there, past the Fountain of Life, which is nothing more than an open volcanic crater. To save her from suddenly up-spurting lava, Smoky carries her beyond the portal which is forbidden to all priestesses of the goddess.

For this, Sylvia is put on trial for her life—and one of the three judges is Cleve Darrell, prematurely white-haired and with a haunting fear in his eyes and a bitten hardness on his face that Smoky does not recognize.

When Smoky explains what has happened in an effort to save the girl, Cleve Darrell rises and says:

"The verdict is clear. The law is broken. Here is the girl who broke it—and the man who aided her. To the headsman with them both!"

Cassidy, stunned and unbelieving, trembles where he stands.

This serial began in the Argosy for May 29

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHAPTER XXI

THE STORY OF DARRELL

IT WAS as though someone had hit me on the point of the chin. There was the same shock from in front, and the same stunning mallet-blow at the base of the brain.

For it was Cleve Darrell who was sentencing me to death!

The third judge now spoke up, saying, "It is true that the woman must die, but as for the man, he has come from a great distance, and because of a friend. The laws of the Smoking Land are strange to him; and a stranger's way should be made easier."

Somewhere, through the haze of my stunned brain, I heard a woman sobbing—not for me, I knew, but for poor Sylvia. Then Sylvia's own voice came out clearly and sharply, saying:

"He would have saved me. It was his will and his strength to save me that brought me into the danger of death. What law is this and what justice if an innocent man, and one who knoweth not our laws, be condemned to death, like a brute beast by hungry men?"

Said the chief judge, "Thou hearest, brother, that two voices speak on his behalf. What dost thou say?"

"I say," said Darrell, "that my heart aches to speak against him. In another life, which I have almost forgotten, I know that he was a friend to me. I know that he has come here to find me, and dared a great many dangers. But what is my wish, my lord, except to keep the laws of the land strongly? If we loosen the bonds even a little, soon all is lost. Wittingly or unwittingly, death is what he has deserved, and death must therefore come to him!"

Well, I had begun to think that all of those people had become enchanted with fear of the judges, but when Darrell finished this speech, a howl and groan of detestation and horror roared upward and filled the great room with thunder. Violated friendship was something which the people of the Smoking Land did not like.

And Darrell, as he heard them roar, stood up, and slowly, little by little, swept his eye over that crowd; and as his glance passed around, a wave of deep silence followed it. I was amazed to see the dignity, the cold, inhuman strength of that man's will power, exerted over so many!

As he sat down again, I heard the chief judge saying, "This is a thing to be known and remembered by many. We know that friendship is dear in all lands. But law is a more sacred mistress. Brother, this sacrifice to truth shall be remembered."

He took up a sort of scepter or baton. "The woman has confessed her trespass. The man has confessed his sin. Therefore I pronounce judgment. He shall die under the ax, and twenty-four hours shall pass before his death. And the priestess shall be bound hand and foot and cast into the fire that burns on the altar of her goddess. She, perhaps, may there save the life of her priestess!"

A long, breathless gasp of horror and fear and grief came from the throats of that crowd.

IN THE meantime, I struggled back out of my dream, and I shouted out, "Cleve, you're not really letting me down like this! You're not such a—"

Half a dozen of the guards hit me like a flying wedge in football. They did not need the added weight of their armor to flatten me out like a steam roller. I went down, and they all kicked me for goals at the same time, and they all scored the goals, and carried me out through that crowd.

The sparks were flying out of my brain for a long time, and when finally I was seeing fairly well again, I was lying securely in my former room. I was tied up like a chicken for the market—so tightly and in so many places, that I could hardly get a full breath down deep into my lungs.

I was so angry at Cleve Darrell that I forgot the darkness, I almost forgot my approaching death. But not for long. Presently, in such a little rag of time, I should

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

be dead up here at the cold end of nowhere, and all report of me would simply be some vague and indefinite hint, traveling far south from Point Barrow, about a fantastic fool who called himself Cassidy, and who walked out over the ice of the northern ocean, and never was heard of again!

Yes, that was all that would be left of me, and of my discovery, and all that the world would know of Sylvia, the priestess, would be nothing at all!

I tell you, the thought that my world of people would not even see an epitaph to remember me by fairly sickened me, and then it stung me so deep that I writhed back and forth. I was still writhing and biting holes in the darkness when the door of my chamber opened, and someone stepped inside. The stranger stood still in the blackness. I howled out:

"If the time has come for me to go, turn on the lights, and I'm ready. I only want to leave a little message behind me for Dr. Darrell—plague his soul!"

Then the light clicked, and the ample current of the light filled the room, and there was Cleveland Darrell just inside the door. He was still wearing the robe and the wig which he had sported as a judge.

He took them both off, saying nothing, while I looked up at him, wondering how my heart could be so filled with hatred and contempt mingled with the ache of an old affection.

And then he leaned over me, and touched the ropes that tied me with the edge of a knife; they snapped away, and he gave me a strong hand to help me to my feet.

Well, I stood there wavering, sick, and stunned and delighted, all together.

"It was all a play, Cleve. You never intended to desert me!" I said finally. He nodded. "I'm a hound ever to have doubted you," said I.

"Man," said he, "remember that you're still a long distance from being free. And you probably will die, Smoky."

I waved my hand. Dying, as a matter of fact, did not seem a matter of such great importance, just then. "I knew that the real man was behind you. Something down inside of me was working and telling me that Cleve Darrell never could have changed. When I first saw you—you were play-acting in that room among the test tubes, and all of that. Am I wrong?"

He shook his head. Not a ghost of a smile had touched his mouth or his eyes. But he was resting his hand upon my sleeve, and his mournful, deep eyes stared at me as though I were a ghost—a thing raised by his own thought.

"What was it, Cleve?" said I. "Sit down here. Tell me about everything—or should I start now to try to break away?"

"The time hasn't come for that," he said. "I should have waited till the last moment. But it seemed to me that it would be worth the extra risk, if I could talk to you for this time. There's a long hour before we make the try."

"To get away?"

"Yes," said he.

"And the girl?" I asked.

He smiled at me, for the first time.

"I haven't forgotten her," said he. "It will be three of us, or none. That's all."

I nodded at him, with my heart swelling. To think that I had doubted him was enough to choke me, of course. "God bless you, Cleve," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"We have about one chance in two or three hundred."

THAT damped my spirits a shade, I must admit. But now that he was with me, I felt that we could cut our way through anything.

"No matter what happens, it'll be worth while to tackle the job together, Cleve. We can't any more than die trying."

He nodded. "But if we miss," said he, "we won't have an easy death, Smoky. The greatest brains in the world are here in this mountain, and if they catch us, they'll give us a death that will be so complete and so perfect, old fellow, that Apaches would turn green with envy to watch it."

"Go on, Cleve," said I. "Tell me every-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing. What was wrong in that room, the first time I saw you?"

"In that room," said he, "everything that I did and said was heard—and seen! Every whisper, every change of expression. In this room, you've been watched in the same way. Until a few moments ago—when I think that I put the mechanism out of order."

"Heard and seen?" said I. "Yes, heard, perhaps, by some funny electrical device. But don't tell me that they can see in the dark!"

He smiled again. "The equivalent of seeing," said he. "They could count your heart-beat and your respiration."

"How the devil could they?" said I.

"It would take me the entire hour to explain that device alone," said he. "Shall I use the time that way?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "Go back to the beginning and tell me what happened to you—at the laboratory, first of all," said I.

He sighed and closed his eyes. And then he settled down in his chair, opposite me, and said, "I'll go back to that. Back to that night when I thought that I was about to make a discovery that would stop the pulse of the world." He laughed a little.

"Were you wrong?" said I.

"I was a young fool," said he. "I thought that I had reached a profound truth. I thought, for one thing, that the whole miracle of life was about to lie in the palm of my hand."

"Were you wrong?"

"Yes," he said, solemnly, "and I've an idea that ten thousand years from now, science will still be just as far as ever from the true solution!"

"I saw you chucking thunder and lightning around," said I.

"That's what I'd managed to devise," said he. "Such a war machine as, I suppose, the world never had seen before. Even these cunning devils up here never had even conceived of the like. And that was all that they needed before they started out to conquer the world!"

I swallowed hard. "At the trial today," I suggested, "you were simply trying to pull the wool over their eyes—make them think that you were seeing everything as they wanted you to see it?"

"That's what I was trying to do," said he, "and that's what I managed, I think. Now to get back to the laboratory. . . . I was working with a tube of radioactive gas and a certain solid compound which in turn was capable of acting upon the gas to—"

"Quit it, Cleve," said I. "Get down to the blood and bones of the thing, will you?"

"That compound and the gas—they are the blood and bones of the thing, I'm afraid," said he. "But I'll simply say that when the gas and the solid combined, they produced an explosion of power—because the power bound up in the atom was suddenly dispersed. The thunderbolt, as you call it, was one form in which that energy could be directed. But there were other ways, too."

"I wondered," said I, "how long a great city would last if it were bombarded the way you blasted the side of that cliff of solid rock!"

"The greatest city in the world," said he, "even Manhattan, all steel and concrete, would be blasted off the face of the earth in five minutes!"

I opened my eyes. I was dead silent, because I could see that he was not lying. He meant what he said!

HE WENT on, with a sort of savage pleasure that I could understand. "I could have flown an aeroplane over the sea and blown the Alps as flat as the sea, and blown up another set of Alps in the central plain of France. I could have split the Rocky Mountains in two—"

He paused. "I'll let the boasting go, from now on," said he. "But I haven't been exaggerating."

Then he went on, "But I'll go back to the time when I was working there at my tubes. I come to the moment when I felt something in the air that was neither sound nor heat nor light—it was simply a

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tremor in my own nerves! I turned around, and there I saw—" He paused and put a hand across his eyes. "I saw sections of the steel wall being cut away in great sweeps. They fell outward without a sound, and the agency that cut through them did so without noise. Nothing could be seen.

"I started for the door to get help—to get you—but at the same moment, I was turned into stone."

"Look here, old man," said I. "I'll believe anything and everything, only don't tell me—"

He smiled—a mere twitch of the lips without mirth.

"Simply a little wireless device for passing through me a tension of electricity so great that I was paralyzed," said he. "And while I was still paralyzed, men came through that gap in the wall and caught hold of me, blindfolded me, and carried me away."

"Great Scott, man, couldn't you even sing out?"

"I could do nothing," said he. "And, after all, I was not so very much surprised. There were foreign nations which knew a good deal about my war machine. I call it a war machine, although as a matter of fact, it would have let loose in behalf of commerce and traffic powers so great that all our vast systems of modern machinery are child's play compared with it!"

I thought, then, of what I had seen—and I said: "The machinery that pushes a ship across the Atlantic in five days—is that child's play, too?"

He considered me with a thoughtful eye. "The same work, according to my device, could be done by a machine that one man could pick up and carry. . . . I was put down in what felt like a boat in a stream—for it gave and wavered a little as other weights got into it, and finally I felt that we had started.

"Someone took the blindfold from me—someone else set my hands free, and I found myself sitting up in an unlighted little compartment, and, looking down, I saw the laboratory just beneath. At the same time a voice said:

" 'Thou mayest send the wave!' And I saw the whole end of the laboratory vanish, as though a big finger had flicked away a part of a little sand house. And that wasn't all. Afterward I felt the bump of the explosion hit us in the air. It was like being lifted by a big wave at sea, and, flowing forward off the top of that wave, we shot away at a speed that fairly blurred the stars together. The mountains leaped by. Up the wave, trees or telegraph poles whirled before the windows with the speed of an express train.

"But what interested me so much that I almost forgot any personal danger was the fact that this speed—which I rated at between three and four hundred miles an hour—was worked up without the slightest suggestion of any screaming propeller or any sort of an engine.

"I said to a man who sat next to me in the dimness, 'What form of insulation do your engineers use to kill the sound?'

" 'Insulation?' said he. 'It is a word unknown to me. But thou wilt find, my friend, that many things are known unto us both by names that differ.'

" 'How many motors are running to drive us at this speed?' I asked. He nearly knocked me out of my seat by telling me that it was not motors that drove us, but expanding rhythmic explosions."

"WHAT in the world did he mean by that?" I asked.

"I couldn't understand, naturally," said Darrell. "It wasn't until long afterward that I found out. But then I saw the hull of our airship, and it looked like the body of a great fish, about fifty or sixty feet long, with one end larger and blunter than the other. The whole thing was streamlined like the body of the mackerel, which is about the fastest *looking* fish that swims the seas. And the wings were simply fins."

"Come along, Cleve," said I.

"I mean it," said he. "Of course, at three or four hundred miles an hour a very small projection would give all the lifting power you want. The propelling force was a sort of tube running through the airship, small

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as a rifle barrel at the front, and expanding towards the rear until it took up the whole diameter of the vessel. And inside of the first chamber charges exploded—"

"Gunpowder?" said I.

"No, something a great deal more powerful than gunpowder, Smoky," said he. He frowned and shook his head. "It's hard to explain what," said he. "But if you want—"

"Great Scott, no," said I. "But what do you mean by progressive rhythms?"

"Simply a delayed explosive—one that burns, you may call it, slowly."

"Something that didn't explode with a bang, then?" said I.

"No," said Darrell. "If you fire a rifle, it kicks back against your shoulder. Well, then, if that explosion came more slowly and steadily, you would only feel pressure against your shoulder, and you could stand up to a great deal more pressure of that type than of the sharply recoiling sort."

"Yes, of course," said I. "A push is a lot easier to take than a punch."

"And suppose," said he, "that you conceive a material that explodes from slow to fast, it would start a bullet slowly down the barrel of a rifle, and give it a harder and harder push all of the way, eh? And that was the sort of stuff those people were burning up. With it, they jumped that night-fish of theirs through the stars, at a rate of over three hundred miles an hour—at *low speed!*"

CHAPTER XXII

GENEALOGY OF THE WISE MEN

I QUIETLY tried to take that in. That would mean—around the world in eighty hours!

"Where in blazes would people get the idea," said I, "of putting themselves inside a rifle, so to speak, holding onto it and letting it kick its way through the world?"

"That's the octopus," said he, "that squirts its way through the sea in much the same fashion. Its swimming apparatus is simply a big pump, and the jet of water it throws kicks it backward through the ocean. But the people of the Smoking Land don't have to trouble nature for patterns. They get 'em out of their own brains!" And he laughed, bitterly, his eye upon thoughts unseen by me.

"Finally," Darrell went on, "I asked where we were bound, and I got a sneering laugh for an answer, and the information that we were bound for the Smoking Land, north of Alaska, and in the region of the Ice Pole."

That remark cleared up the rest of the sentence which I had been unable to guess from the words found on that scratched bit of metallized wood.

"And then," said Darrell, "when I got a chance, I picked up a little broken fragment of material such as I had never seen before. I asked what it was, and my nearest companion told me that a sheet of it, one thirty-second of an inch thick would turn back a steel-jacketed high-speed rifle bullet fired pointblank—

"It was as light as wood and I thought that if it was as durable as all that, it might serve my purpose. I had on a diamond ring with a sharply pointed facet, and in the darkness I started scratching my new address as well as I could—but the fellow beside me suspected that something was wrong. He grabbed my arm.

"They have wonderful brains in the Smoking Land, Smoky, but they haven't devised a good way of blocking a short right uppercut. I nailed my friend on the point of the chin and then smashed the heavy glass of the window beside me, and threw the scrap of wood through the hole.

"Then other hands caught me, and I was tied hand and foot for the rest of the trip. Daylight came on, polar day, dim, and misty. And then down through that mist we dove, like a fish hunting in the deep sea, and made a landing as soft as you please.

"I was taken out of the airship, and got my first glimpse of the smoking mountain that gives its name to the island. We went underground immediately, and a few minutes later I was closeted with an old, decrepit, white-headed man. His hair was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thin with age, and finer than cobwebs. It floated around his head and shoulders, and made him look like a very ancient picture of Zeus. And I heard from his lips the reason why I'd been brought to the Smoking Land, and what I was to do for them.

"But before I tell you about that, I had better explain the whole picture of life up here."

"Yes," said I. "Tell me who these people are, and what their blood is, and whether they're English or Esquimau or what!"

"Go back," said he, "a few centuries, to the time when people were breaking their hearts to get across the barrier of the American continents to India. It never occurred to those hardy old sailors of Italy and France and Spain and Portugal and England that the 'barrier' was worth a devil of a lot more than all of India, multiplied by ten. Their minds were still filled with dreams about trees covered with golden fruit and diamond blossoms. . . . The Americas were simply in the way, and when they found that to get around the Horn was no joke, and that the Strait of Magellan was a regular death trap, they swung to the north and started hammering away at the northwest passage.

"IMAGINE a blunt-bowed ship putting out of the port of Bristol with a crew of seventy-nine gentlemen adventurers, common sailors, officers, and what-not, plus one lone woman.

"Keep your mind on the woman, in particular, because she's important. Her name was Sylvia."

I stood straight up from my chair.

"All right," said Darrell, grinning at me in a strange way. "Your guess is right. She's the ancestress, fifteen or twenty generations back, of your own Sylvia. But now imagine that ship between Greenland and the coast, using up every advantage of what must have been wonderfully favoring winds, and an exceptional clearness of sea. They actually swung around the northern coast of the continent, and got on toward the Behring Sea; and then they were caught in the inevitable ice jam. But to make their luck stranger and more perfect, the captain, his wife, and some twenty or thirty other survivors, were carried by the ice-currents until they were in view of the Smoking Land. They made the shore, and the Esquimau they found here were friendly disposed to them.

"The captain and his wife were the king and queen, as you might say, of that little group. The ship was broken up, and there was no chance of using it again. The men intermarried with the Esquimaux, and their descendants, to this day, are the inhabitants of the land. That's why the complexion is prevailingly white.

"But the captain and his wife, mind you, kept apart from the rest, as a sea-captain was bound to do. And eventually they had children—a son and three fine daughters, and as the daughters got to the marriageable age, they were married to the lads who had been mere ship's boys on the voyage out, not gentlemen adventurers; and they were taken into the family of their wily old father-in-law of a captain. For he intended to raise up a dynasty of pure white blood to rule the land. And that is exactly what happened. For you find, in the mountain here, what they call the Wise Men, the direct descendants of the captain and the first Sylvia, and you find the rest of the land filled with a people of mixed blood, a sort of white Esquimau.

"To keep the Esquimaux thoroughly in order, that captain—his name was Philip Grey—devised a religion for them, out of their own beliefs plus a few inventions of his own, one of which was a 'goddess' for the people to worship. The goddess was not only invented, but she was reinforced with a few gunpowder miracles and such, until the Esquimaux were thoroughly awed. Then they were given a steady succession of priestesses, and the priestesses were of the pure blood of the rulers of the land. Don't you see the idea? Pick out a girl child, and educate her like her white fellows, but simply see that she is taught to believe in the goddess. She remains close to her parents, in the hands of the whites,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a tool and a mouthpiece out of which the Esquimaux are easily and perfectly ruled. Is that clear?"

"Philip Grey must have been a genius," said I.

"HE was one of the world's great men, in his own way," said Darrell. "There's no doubt of that. And he founded a race, up here, of which the world is pretty sure to hear one day.

"But to go on. The country filled, eventually, with a mixed breed, who knew nothing about their half-white ancestry, who followed the faith of the goddess, who performed the orders which her priestess passed down from the Wise Men, and who acted as the servants and the guards of the all-whites.

"The whites remained a handful of men and women; and today they are further segregated. Up to the age of—I think it's twenty-five, every young man is educated like his fellows. He may have a command in the guards, or he may turn into a great hunter, but if at the age of twenty-five he shows that he has trustworthy powers, and a brain and a will, he is brought before the Wise Men, and initiated into their order.

"The Wise Men saw, early in the game, that brains were their tools. So brains were what they used. They could not have spring and summer in this bleak land, so they made the warmth *under* the land. They were backed up against a wall, so they had to use their wits every way they could. The result was that they soon were handing down vastly increased scientific brain-power and knowledge to their descendants. They turned to mathematics as a pastime, almost, and mathematics is the key that unlocks the doors of most of the mysteries of the universe.

"Even so, they would not have made all of their present progress except that now and then they made contacts with the outside world and found out what had been discovered there. Two or three shipwrecks in the course of the centuries—particularly the wreck of a ship belonging to a scientific expedition in eighteen ninety-something—kept them fairly up with the times. And on that broad foundation, they went ahead. Incidentally, though, they clung to some of their old ways. Their clothes, for instance, patterned after the old styles—their speech—it must have been a kind of nostalgia for their felt and not remembered origins.

"They learned, very early, to control the great heating plant here—the volcano—by constructing certain great sluices that connect with the sea. The mountain can't explode unless the sluices are blocked up. And with the heat of this great furnace at their command, they soon had comfortable homes, and above all, an almost inexhaustible source of power. They used that power to drill out the heart of the mountain. And they've equipped themselves to lead happy lives—after their fashion.

"But they never have forgotten the old traditions of greener, happier lands to the south. An early type of airship they devised some fifteen years ago. And in their first voyage, they went all over the world. They saw that there *were* delightful regions. They saw, also, that they were light years ahead of the rest of the world in most of their mechanical devices. And they were simply looking around for some tremendously powerful device that would make them world conquerors.

"Finally they got wind of my experiments, and straightway decided that I should become their servant. Should teach them my secret."

"And have you?"

"No," said Darrell, looking me straight in the eye. "Somehow they've never been able to get together exactly the right materials for me!"

He smiled; and I understood.

CHAPTER XXIII

ARMS AND TWO MEN

WELL, I began to feel smaller and smaller as the true fineness of Darrell's character showed. It was plain enough that he could have put into the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hands of these northern wolves weapons with which—combined with their own inventions—they could have plundered the rest of the world. But he had not done so. He preferred to accept anything rather than to turn these half-barbarians, half-supermen loose upon the rest of the world.

"Cleve, you used to beat me in the old days with that uppercut of yours. You beat me a lot worse now, in other ways. You mean that you've only been pretending to work for them in their laboratories?"

"That's all," said he. "And furthermore, I'll never work again for any man. I'm through tinkering with life's deep secrets. If I could get back to my country, I'd get a job riding a cow pony, or pitching hay, or digging ditches. I've had my hands on power too long. They ache from it—and tremble. I've seen too much, Smoky. . . ."

He paused, and seemed lost in thought, while I pondered him again, and wondered over him. Pain had scarred his face as I had never seen it before, or since, in any man upon this earth. And now, out of the torment, he had reached his decision. Darrell was made of different stuff from most. He stood by himself; he was on a mountain peak of strength, far above the general level of the rest of us.

I felt that, as I watched him.

And now he began undoing a bolt of cloth which he had brought along under his arm. Inside were two pairs of cuirasses similar to those I had taken from Murder's original owner.

He told me to put one on, and I was only too glad to. I got my doublet off, put the cuirass next to my shirt, and dressed again, while he was doing the same.

He did not need to tell me that there was the worst sort of danger and trouble ahead. When a man puts on armor, there is only one reason for it. He expects steel or bullets or both to be coming his way before long.

"What is this stuff, Cleve? Is it fossilized something or other?"

"It was made a century or so ago by one of the wisest of the Wise Men," said Darrell. "Apparently he used a vegetable fiber, which he pressed almost to the consistency of wood. And then he worked on that vegetable substance in a way that no one understands today. By impregnating the fibers, he finally turned out what you see. It's as light as wood, and as strong as steel—a good deal stronger than any steel I know about. A five-thousand ton ship, armored with this stuff properly, could laugh at all the big guns, and submarine mines, and aeroplane bombs in the world. But so far, these people never have been able to duplicate the work of the old fellow who made these. He died before he could communicate his secret process to anyone. They've tried for generations, day and night, to rediscover the process."

"But what about you? Have they been watching you?"

"Every minute."

"Not when I was there with you."

"They wanted to tempt me into talking; but even though there was no one in the room, I was being watched from every side."

"Do they suspect that you're holding out on them?"

"I don't know," said Darrell. "I don't think so. If they really did, they'd torture me until I died to tear the process out of me. I've grown white, I've turned into an old man, Smoky, in fear of that time of torture. I've prayed until my heart ached for the courage to stand the strain, when it comes. Because it surely *will* come, and then if I give way, I've—destroyed the whole of civilization."

I REMINDED him that I had seen one of the cuirasses before, and he told me about the fugitive I had met to the south.

"He was one of the guards. About two years ago he displeased one of the Wise Men, and he was slated to be flogged until the skin was flayed from his body."

I shuddered. "Is that one of their standard punishments?"

"They are devils, pure and simple. They've lived as autocrats and tyrants for too many centuries for the other people of the Smoking Land to rise against them."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Have the people ever tried that?" I asked.

"Yes. Only four or five years ago, I believe, there was a revolt. Half the men of the land were up in arms. But it was no good. They got as far as the inner rooms of the Wise Men, where they were killed like bugs by a neat little electrical device that I was shown once. I heard that when the poor devils tumbled over, there were actual wisps of smoke curling from their blackened flesh.

"The Wise Men are the most arrogant and complacent blackguards I ever saw or heard of, and the only real spice of life to them is to plan what devils they'll turn loose on the sleeping world to the south—and to torture the lower classes up here in the Smoking Land. They use the goddess as a name to hide behind. They make the priestess their tool."

"She wouldn't stand for it," I declared. "Not Sylvia!"

"I don't mean that the priestess is corrupt," said he. "I simply mean that she's worked on through suggestion. Her mind is made to work along the train of thought *they* want. You see?"

I nodded.

"Well," he went on, "the half white you met was a bold fellow, and when he heard of the sentence which had been imposed on him, he stole one of these cuirasses, and then ran. I don't know how he got through. But he was all iron and able to stand anything, I suppose. There was a terrible commotion here about it. They sent out the sky ships to hunt for him. And the fellow who was interested in having him punished fell into such a fury of sulky rage because the poor devil had got away, that he had to go to bed, very sick."

"Why, Cleve," said I, "they must be ghouls!" I remembered how that runaway white Esquimau had been so filled with fear of what might come on him from the north that he had chosen to go out and freeze to death in the blizzard because he dared not interrupt his flight. He must have felt that the very devils were riding the air!

"WHAT'S our next step?" I asked Darrell.

"The next step," said he, "is to make sure that we're properly armed."

"I have a rifle and a revolver," said I. "And here's Murder, who'll fight a man and tear his throat as well as the next one!"

He looked at the dog with an appraising eye. "Murder may be a help," said he. "But your own rifle and the revolver will be more."

"Haven't they any weapons like these?" said I.

"No," he answered.

"With all their brains, couldn't they copy a revolver or a rifle?"

"They could, of course, but they don't want to have such things lying about. They prefer to defend themselves by electric devices such as I was telling you about, or with bombs. They have explosives that will do a good job of tearing down mountains. Oh, they're a bad lot, but they've never dared to have modern weapons lying about. They turn out a few arquebuses and such old stuff for their guards, and the people on the outside generally hunt with bows and arrows—you've seen the big bone bows, made like the old English longbows. As it happens, that rifle and revolver will probably give us a fighting chance. It would have been quite hopeless without them."

"Is it going to be a matter of fighting our way through?" I asked him.

"Only for a short brush," said he. "If it's a long fight, of course we're done for. It's almost inconceivable to me that we can get out of the mountain without some sort of a fight. Everything is guarded to the hilt!"

"Well," said I, "I'd rather die fighting than under torture!"

"And that's the only alternative," said he.

We looked at one another then, and I know that I was pleased to be tackling the great adventure with Darrell beside me. He would not fail when the pinch came. He smiled and nodded a bit as though he

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

approved of me, too. But in his smile there was a little frank amusement—I suppose I was making a horribly resolute face.

"And what first?" said I.

"My room," he answered, "then Sylvia . . . and then wings!"

CHAPTER XXIV

LIKE A CAT IN THE DARK

WE went to his room by a way that surprised me. For only once did we go by one of the great corridors which ran like roadbeds through the mountain. This we crossed, and the rest of the time we were walking in narrow little bylanes that climbed up and descended and twisted this way and that. As we were going down this strange secret passage my friend switched out the powerful little light which he carried in his hand, and the next minute I saw a starry radiance just in front of us, which blotted out in the next instant.

I stood close to Darrell and heard him whisper, "That's bad!"

"I can send Murder down that alley and finish whoever it is."

"Oh, no!" said Darrell.

We stood still. Murder rubbed his massive shoulder against my knee, as though to tell me that he was at hand, and ready. And then something rustled close to us. At the same instant, Darrell switched on his light again and showed me one of the ugliest sights I've ever known—the form of a man leaping through the air with a knife in his left hand, driving it straight at Darrell's breast. And his dark face was contorted with devilish fear and rage and cruelty.

How could he have leaped so soon? He could not have jumped in the dark, and there had hardly been enough time from the snapping on of Darrell's light to the instant when I saw him making his spring.

Not even Murder had time to make a counter leap when the hand of the assassin struck right into the breast of Darrell. The long knife blade went to pieces like glass, and the fragments shivered down in a rain on the floor as the point of the weapon bit vainly against the impenetrable armor that covered Darrell's breast.

My fist landed flush on the side of the fellow's jaw and knocked him against the wall. Then he fell loosely back into Darrell's arms while Murder stood by, red-eyed, licking his lips, and looking at me for permission to go to work.

I cursed him out of the way and looked more closely at the stranger. He was still so stunned that his eyelids were lowered. And his skin looked as white and delicate as the skin of a woman. A short moustache was beginning to darken his upper lip, and a tuft of beard was forming on his chin. He looked to be about twenty-five years old, and he was a handsome, clean-featured lad.

He opened his eyes, and they were the blue of steel. A cold gray sheen was mixed with their blueness and gave him a certain inhuman savagery of expression.

My Colt was held like a club in my hand.

"He can't be anything except in our way," said I to Darrell.

But Cleve shook his head.

His lips were pinched tight and small with disgust and there was horror in his eyes. "Let him be," he commanded.

I stepped back a little while Murder sat down and cocked his head to keep one eye on the stranger, and another on me, waiting for orders.

I saw Darrell take from the man a long, ponderous old pistol with a great and complicated lock, and a second and shorter knife, which the man wore in the breast of his doublet.

Darrell asked me to tie the fellow's hands, and I did so with a piece of strong twine that Darrell had in his pocket.

In a little while, our captive was quite himself again, there was a decided swelling coming up on the side of his face, though, where my knuckles had smashed against his jawbone.

He stood up as straight and calm as you please, and looked first me in the eye, and then Darrell.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Why did you try it?" Darrell asked.

"I was ordered to."

"Who ordered you?"

"I'll talk no more," said the boy. "If you murder me, they'll tear you to pieces—slowly, till you die."

"They may do that anyway," said I to Darrell. "They're against you, and they've sent this one as their bloodhound to get the taste of your heart!"

Darrell kept considering his prisoner with a mixture of loathing and pity and interest.

"Murder, eh?" said he. "They wanted you to cut my throat, Arthur?"

"Whatever they wanted," said Arthur, "I've done with talking."

RAGE took possession of me when I saw his calmness. I got him by the throat and jammed him back against the wall. I laid the muzzle of my revolver against his temple and snarled, close to his face:

"You talk or you're dead. I don't care, much, either way. I'd rather have you dead quick, than alive and talking!"

Well, I had guessed right. Or my instinct, rather, had done the guessing for me. The red sap ran right out of his face, and his eyes turned wide and glassy.

"He'll kill me!" he gasped to Darrell.

"Yes, he's a pretty wild man, Arthur. I can't do anything with him. If I were you, I'd do what he wants."

"What do you want?" says Arthur to me.

"Your answers to whatever's asked of you," said I.

"Then I am dead a little later," he groaned, "and by such a death as men cannot imagine. But what are the questions?"

"Who sent you after me?" asked Darrell, again.

The young fellow answered, "Wilbur, son of John."

"He himself?"

"Yes, he himself. He talked to me about you. He took me into his confidence." He seemed to gather up some of his lost pride, again, as he said this.

Darrell was nodding. "He sent you to murder me?"

"If thou shouldst leave thy chamber."

"If I so much as left my room."

"That was the order."

"And no warning to be given to me?"

"None."

Darrell sighed. "You see what a nest of snakes this is?" he said to me. I gritted my teeth. "What was your reward to be, Arthur?"

"All thy possessions, and more."

"Not a very large price," said Darrell. "But you've never liked me very well. Tell me this, Arthur—what was it that made Wilbur the son of John so hot to have me dead? He was interested in my experiments up to a few days ago."

"He says that thou wilt never complete the experiment," said Arthur. "He says that thou art such a fool that thou wouldst rather die than make them and thyself the conquerors of the world."

"So he wanted me dead, as soon as he made that decision about me?' '

"Yes, then he wanted thee dead."

"And tonight?"

"He had bad dreams. He was troubled in his mind. He thought of thee, and said to himself, 'Yonder is the man!' " Some bit of feeling came into the voice of the boy as he quoted the words.

"It's a rotten bad business," said I to Darrell. "Gag this brat and put him away."

"I can learn something more from him," said Darrell. "He's the son of the great Wilbur, and Wilbur is the king of them all, when it comes to brains and influence. Arthur," he went on," what is his reason for wishing to have Sylvia murdered?"

"His reason," said Arthur, "is just what thine or mine would be."

"I don't quite know what that reason is," said Darrell.

"Why," said Arthur, surprised, "because he wants to see how far her courage will last when the flames begin to lick up around her. He will have the altar fire low, and fanned so that the blaze will first burn her legs away, and my father

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swears that before her shins are well roasted, or even cooked brown, she will be shrieking!"

I groaned with disgust, but to my bewilderment, I heard laughter, and it was from Arthur.

"For all her piety and her trust in the goddess," he laughed. "We'll hear her screaming, and begging for sweet, swift death!"

I held myself hard, to keep from smashing my fist against his cruel mouth. Darrell, however, watched him in a reflective silence.

"That's all, Arthur," said he. "If I turn you loose, now, and let you go, I wonder if I could trust your word of honor to not repeat anything that you have heard or seen, concerning me, tonight?"

Fierce fire came into the eyes of Arthur. He glanced quickly down to the ground.

"Thou couldst trust me to be silent as a stone," said he. "All my life, besides, I would be a friend to thee!" I thought that Darrell was about to be taken in by these assurances, but suddenly he shook his head.

"You hate me, Arthur," said he, "so bitterly that you can't lie very well to me." He waved him ahead. "We'll go on together, Arthur," said he. "I've already found out that you can jump like a cat in the dark, and therefore we'll be watching you closely. Go on softly and steadily, and perhaps you may live through the night, after all!"

WE were in Darrell's room a moment later, and I found it very like my own, except that there were two or three big curtained recesses in it. In one of these we put Arthur, the son of Wilbur, after we'd lashed his feet strongly together, and gagged him thoroughly.

I whispered to Darrell, "Are we safe in here? Can the spies reach us?"

He said deliberately, "I think not."

I jumped. "You don't know?" said I.

"I don't entirely know. But I think that I've found the way of spoiling their devices. Their electrical eyes and ears fail to work sometimes when the wires short-circuit the current—fuses burn out—that sort of thing."

He smiled a little at me. But I was not in a humor to be amused easily.

"Whatever we do we ought to do quickly, it seems to me, Cleve," said I.

"I want to," said he. "The mere thought of getting away from this place makes me dizzy with happiness. I've been trying for years to learn all the ropes, to study the navigation of the airships, and to find, if possible, some companion who would be willing to take the chance and run with me. But now that everything is ready there's one great stoppage."

"What's that?" I asked.

"There's the priestess. You haven't forgotten her, Smoky?"

Forget her? I shuddered when I remembered what the boy had said—how the fire would be controlled so that the flames would devour her body slowly, bit by bit!

"How are we to get her out of her prison?" Darrell said.

"If she's guarded," said I," we might be able to rush the guards—"

"There'd be a fight, then, and fights make noise, and noise travels far along rock corridors. Besides, they have their system of mechanical ears that pick up sounds and carry them, and identify the places from which they come. We'd have a hundred men around us in no time!"

I tried to think; my head simply spun. Darrell, in the meantime, was walking up and down, his head bowed. Finally he said:

"I might try sham authority."

"How?" said I.

"I know where she's kept," he answered. "And after all, I'm one of the inner circle of the powers, in the eyes of the common soldiers. They don't know that I'm just a toy in the hands of their real leaders. They think that I'm one of the chosen few! If I appeared and told them—well, told them, for instance, that the girl was wanted for an examining consultation in my own chamber, by a few of the highest ones—yes, if I used the name of the father of Arthur yonder—there's a very good chance

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that I could get her back here. From this room—well, later on, as soon as the way was clear, we could start again. I can't think of a better way."

I nodded. "It sounds clumsy, Cleve," said I.

"I know it does," he agreed. "But clumsy inventions are better than none. Otherwise, I don't know how we'll be able to turn the key of her door, or walk her through the guards. If they bring her here, they'll be glad if I dismiss them for an hour."

"Perhaps it might pan out," I admitted. "You'll have to keep a straight face. But look here, Cleve—you're taking all the danger and all the responsibility."

"Your share will come later on," said he. "And while I'm gone, you'll be on the edge of a higher cliff than the one I'm walking."

"Go on, then," said I, "and Heaven knows I'll be praying for you while you're gone."

HE went at once to the door and there he paused and held out his hand. I gripped it hard, and was glad to find that it was both warm and steady. Darrell's nerve was as splendid a thing as could be found in the world.

Then the door closed behind him, and I was alone. Well, that was the beginning of a bad time, you may be sure.

I saw everything that could possibly happen occurring behind my back; I walked the length of long, echoing corridors with my friend. I saw him confront the guards; I heard them laugh in his face!

I paced up and down in a frenzy until, finally, even the thought of the boy in the recess was a comfort. He was possible human companionship.

So I went to the recess and drew the curtain, and looked down into his face.

He was lying flat on his back, and when he saw me, a gleam of mockery, or triumph lighted up his eyes. Finally, I ventured to take the gag from between his teeth.

He dragged in a few deep breaths, and then smiled at me with contempt and mastership. "Count thy few moments," he said to me," for they are soon ended."

"You lie, Arthur," said I, "and as you've already been told, you're not lying well, today."

At this, he closed his eyes with the heartiness of his laughter; it shook his entire body. I had an almost irresistible temptation to reach down and throttle him, but I controlled it. After all, even this sort of conversation was better than pacing up and down the room in silence, imagining the end of the world.

"Dost know why I laugh?" he said.

"Because you're a fool," I suggested.

"In what name will he require the priestess from the guard?" he asked.

"In the name of your sainted father, my friend," said I.

He laughed again. When he could speak, he said, "My father is even now with her, questioning, trying to break down her faith." He began to laugh again, but for my part, I felt a great cold wave of despair come over me.

For there was no question but that he was telling me the truth. His malice was too perfect, and the light in his eyes still gloated and gleamed up at me.

And the thing was clear to my eyes—that after we had accomplished so much, Darrell was now to be thrown away by the sheerest freak of chance. All hope went instantly out of me.

CHAPTER XXV

EVASION

NOW, for the first time, I have to follow Darrell by himself, as he walked down the narrow twisting ways that brought him, in a few moments, to the door behind which Sylvia was kept prisoner.

Outside, three or four soldiers were keeping guard, sitting on a pair of benches. And the same number, wrapped in cloaks, were lying asleep on the floor. The ser-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

geant in charge of the party got up to challenge Darrell, and Cleve walked straight up to him.

He was recognized. The sergeant got out his long, straight-edged sword, and saluted, and asked for the will of his master, and Darrell said:

"I have come in the name of Wilbur, the son of John, and some others, who require the presence of the priestess in my chamber. Let her be brought out at once."

"Dost thou come, master, in the name of Wilbur, the son of John?" said the sergeant, looking bewildered.

"Yes," said Darrell.

"This is a mystery even in the mysterious mountain," said the sergeant. "For mine own eyes saw Wilbur, the son of John, enter the chamber of the priestess only ten minutes ago, and now he has sent you in his name to fetch her out."

Darrell's heart stood still.

"Has he melted through the walls of the solid rock?" muttered the sergeant.

However, he went to the door, and struck his heavy hand against it, then turned the handle and thrust it wide. It revealed to Darrell the tall form and the white beard of Wilbur sitting at a small table opposite the priestess, and in the midst of a grave discourse with her, his long arm extended to reinforce a point which he was just making.

The sergeant saluted him, saying, "The priestess is called for in thy name, master, and yet thou art here present with her!"

Darrell was too numb to move. He wanted, he said afterward, to take to his heels and run like a child, but there were some faster feet than his nearby, and the soldiers were closing in, anxious to get at the heart of the mystery.

He only heard old Wilbur saying to the girl, "Your belief which is no belief, then, and your faith which is no faith—"

However, the old graybeard broke off, and came rapidly out into the corridor. He wore a long, sweeping robe; his long, thin hair fell in a cloud about his stern face and cramped shoulders. His feet were in loose slippers, with pointed toes, and his whole appearance was at once unkempt and grand.

Straight up to Darrell he stalked, and then he roared out in a voice of thunder, months of bruted suspicion, and real dislike and distrust and rising hatred all breaking into his words:

"What fool calls in my name when I am already here? Or what villain art thou, then? And what is thy meaning?"

The fierce old man was enough to stun the eyes; but along with it, behind it, Darrell could not help seeing the form of his son, trussed like a beast for market, and lying in the recess of Darrell's room. Oh, the deaths that would be devised for all of us!

He saw those deaths burning in the eye of the seer—he felt the heat of flame and the grinding of steel through nerve and flesh and biting against the bone.

BUT with his mind still half fixed upon the thought of the imprisoned youth, he stepped closer to old Wilbur, the son of John, and said:

"My ancient and wise friend, come two steps with me. I have a word for you that concerns you."

"Concerns me?" said the terrible old man. "Nothing concerns me now, except to guess that thou art a villain!"

"Also," said Darrell, "it has to do with your clever son!" And he made himself sneer at Wilbur, the son of John.

The last speech, and the look that went along with it, unsettled the dignity and the old man's poise.

He swept the guards away with a gesture; he grabbed Darrell's shoulder and marched him three steps away down the hall.

"What dost thou mean when thou smiledst at the name of my son?" he asked.

"I mean," said Darrell, with a sudden heat of satisfaction, as he began to guess that he had found a winning card, "I mean that the sneaking rat was caught spying, and murdering, and that he's now lying tied and gagged in my room."

Old Wilbur might have fallen, but the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wall was near him, and he put his hand against it.

Out of the corner of his eye, he glared at Darrel, muttering, "Never have I put faith in thee, thou dog! Never from the beginning! The fire should have eaten thee long ago, if my judgment had been taken!"

Darrell had recovered from his shock, by this time, and he could afford to smile with contempt and triumph at the older man.

"Now what do you say? Have I come in your name, demanding the priestess?"

"Thou art a rash and a foolish man," said old Wilbur. "What will come to thee hereafter from this—" He paused, and ground his teeth with rage and spite. But at length he muttered, "What dost thou gain from taking her?"

"Not from this cell, only," said Darrell, "but away from this whole cursed Smoking Land."

"This is madness," said Wilbur.

"I have come in your name, demanding the girl," repeated Darrell.

A groan of rage came from Wilbur's throat; he turned sharply around and roared at the soldiers, "Fools, dolts, blockheads, ye have received orders, and still ye stand? Out with the girl—the priestess—the fool—whatever she may be, and drive her down the corridor before us!"

They brought Sylvia out, however, with a sufficient reverence, and she saw before her the man who had confirmed her sentence of death—Cleve Darrell!

She could not realize, now, that his coming was through a feeling of friendship. She could only realize that death itself must now be only a step away from her. But her head went up all the higher, and a faint smile came on her lips, and the color burned up in her devoted face.

And Darrell found himself thinking, "Oh, beautiful fool and martyr!"

The soldiers would have escorted the two dignitaries and the priestess, but Darrell said, "We walk alone!"

This halted them, and Wilbur, after a silent struggle, did not countermand the order.

They went on silently, the three of them, until they came to the door of Darrell's room, and he waved to Wilbur to enter. The old man hesitated.

"What do I find here?" said he.

"Your son," said Darrell.

"Thou hast murdered him!" said Wilbur, groaning in the depths of his throat.

"No," said Darrell. "He's still alive. Open the door, and you'll find him."

He merely said, "We hold a conference, then?"

"We confer," said Darrell. And he frowned, to keep himself from laughing for joy, for he was beginning to see his way clearly out of the impasse.

AT any rate, what I, inside the room, still talking to that venomous lad Arthur, first saw, was the tall form of Wilbur the son of John, striding into the room like angry fate.

My heart turned to water; but then I saw Darrell, also, and no soldiers guarding the party, and last and best of all, Sylvia! I got to her side in three steps and took hold of her hands, as Darrell closed the heavy door behind him.

"It is true, and you're here, and you shall not die, Sylvia!" said I.

"What thing hast thou said?" murmured the girl, looking gravely up to my face. "And dost thou speak it from knowledge or only from a tender heart?"

Other things were happening then, that broke even through the happiness of seeing her alive and sound, and free for that moment, at least.

Old Wilbur was in a grand tantrum at the sight of his son lying on the floor; and he had out a knife in a jiffy to cut the cords, when Darrell stopped him with a grip that probably wasn't any too gentle. Wilbur straightened up and looked savagely at Darrell, and a second time at me.

"What treason is this?" he said.

"You can see the sort of treason for yourself, Wilbur," said Darrell. "Here's the pair of people you wanted to see die; you wanted to enjoy their agony. But you won't. They're both going free."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Dost know, foolish fellow," said Wilbur, drawing himself up higher than before, and talking grandly down to Darrell, "dost know that the thing thou speakest may never be while there are men in the Smoking Land?"

"Dost *thou* know," said Darrell, in savage mockery, "that thou wilt lie flat on thy back in this room, gagged and tied like thy fine son, here, while the three of us walk freely out of the mountain, and sail away in one of the airships to our own country? Smoky, throw a gun on this old rat, will you?"

That touch of Westernism made everything seem easy and natural and simple, to me. I covered Wilbur with my gun.

"It was all lying—all lying!" he snarled, "when thou dids't speak of thy devotion to the science which we nurse here—all the while thou yearned for thine own people!"

"Yes," said Darrell. "Every day it yearned for them. You and your gang of cutthroats, what could you mean to a decent man? Nothing but a chance to turn murder loose on the world. But you knew or guessed before this evening what I felt. You sent this whelp of yours to hunt me, and except for chance, he would have put a knife through my heart."

"Alas, that he failed!" moaned Wilbur, son of John.

"Come up closer, Smoky," said Darrell. "That's right. Stick the gun into his ribs, and if he stirs, let him have a pair of bullets through him. Why I don't kill you out of hand, I don't know," he went on. "It's a part of the weakness of which you've accused all my people. The reason, you say, why the future would be benefited, if all of us were wiped off the face of the globe. But we won't be wiped off, Wilbur, son of John, and neither shall we be slaves to the Smoking Land. And so, if you'll kindly excuse me, we'll leave you quietly here behind us."

AS he spoke, he secured the old man's hands, and when Wilbur started to make answer, a balled-up handkerchief was jammed between his teeth, and cut his voice to a gurgling.

We soon stretched him out, tied until he couldn't wriggle, and then we looked to the bonds of Arthur.

"What wouldst thou do?" said Sylvia, looking gravely at me.

"We are taking you, Sylvia," said I, "to a southern land—to our own people, and away from eternal winter, and the smoking mountain, and the murder and fire that runs riot in this land. Will you come?"

"Ah," said she, "how may I go, when the goddess hath not spoken?"

I took so much pleasure in listening to her gentle voice, mind you, that I hardly comprehended what she was saying, but then I made out the words of Darrell, as he answered:

"You see, Sylvia, that we could not have come here, we could not even have dared to think of taking you away, if the goddess had not expressly inspired us. Who are we to do such things and defy the wise men, except through her strength?"

It was like the breaking of sunlight through clouds, to see the change in the girl's face. "Dost thou truly say so?" said she.

"Yes, we truly say so. How else can you imagine it yourself, Sylvia?" said Darrell.

"My mind turns, and is darkened," said Sylvia, "and yet there is something like a voice that speaketh within me, and saith that all may be well!"

And I knew, then and there, that her scruples were conquered. We did not linger.

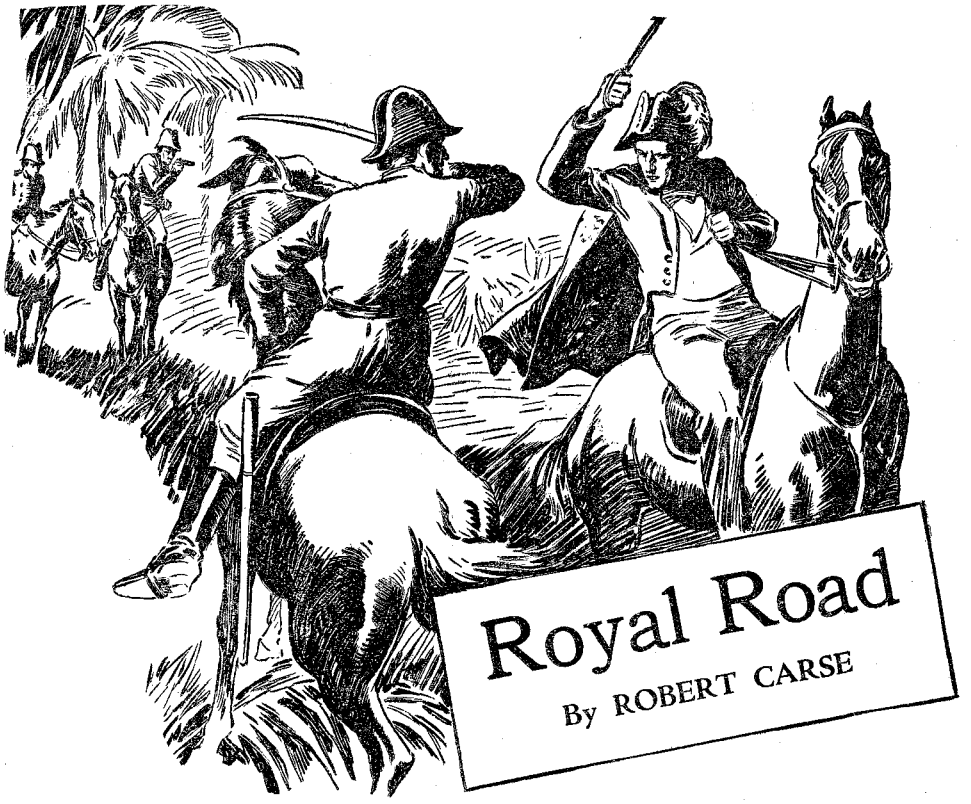
Darrell picked up a quantity of clothes and wraps. I took the rifle, and we stepped out into the long corridor, and went along its glimmering dimness, and between its polished walls, until we came to the first turning, and then, far behind us, we heard a great clamor of blows, and looked back.

Through the faint twilight that filled the distant corridor, we could see armed men at the door of Darrell's room, beating upon it.

How long would it be before they were inside?

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Royal Road

By ROBERT CARSE

A vivid story of Old Haiti—and not a word of Voodoo in it!

JOHN FORSYTHE walked with long and vigorous strides from the quay and the ship which half an hour ago had brought him to Haiti from Jamaica. He stared about him with keen interest, his hand lingering near his sword hilt; already he was experiencing a sensation of nervous tension. A brooding and savage spirit held this place and showed itself in the faces of the crowds of blacks he passed on the narrow brick sidewalks. Cape Henry was what they called the town now, he thought, but not long ago it had been Cap Français, and the wealthiest port and town in France's proud colony of Haiti.

In this year of 1820 there were only a few whites left; the revolting blacks under Toussaint and the other cruel Negro generals had massacred the French in thousands. Now, out there in the hills twenty miles away, Henri Christophe, the strapping ex-slave who had made himself king, ruled at his palace of Sans Souci with implacable violence. The town's name had been changed in his honor.

John Forsythe thought suddenly of Leah Stewart, and his jaw muscles tightened. It was high time, he reflected, to come to take Leah away from here. The Kingdom of Haiti as governed by Henri Christophe was no place for a sensitive and high-spirited young white woman like Leah. These thoughts occupied him until he reached the palace gates.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Head back, clipping his words off sharply, John Forsythe answered the challenges of the black sentries at the entry to the governor's palace. He wore civilian dress but despite that fact, these Negro guardsmen had no trouble recognizing him as a soldier and an officer.

He was smiling a little bit as a courtly mulatto secretary came to greet him. "I have letters," he said, "for Duke Richard, the Governor of Cape Henry."

The secretary bowed and murmured that at this moment Duke Richard was with the King at Sans Souci. He glanced again at the letters Forsythe had presented. On their envelopes was witten plainly.

Presenting Lieutenant Forsythe of His Majesty King George's Seventeenth Regiment of Royal Marines

The secretary returned the letters with another bow. "Enter please, Lieutenant," he said.

John Forsythe stood for a moment at the window of the big room after the secretary had left and closed the door. Then he crossed swiftly to the huge mahogany desk in the far corner. The desk belonged to Duke Richard, the governor-general, he was sure. Bending over it, his breath short and quick.

It contained no papers; the blotter was empty. A solid brass inkstand was at one side, and a small calendar was slid beneath. John Forsythe did not hesitate; he reached down and drew the calendar into his hands.

Scruples, he whispered silently, did not count after what he had just seen through the window—troops, hundreds of them, quietly gathering in the courtyard. The secretary had said Duke Richard would return shortly. At any moment, the secretary might come back. John Forsythe loosened the lean blade of his sword. He could take care of the secretary and Duke Richard himself if that should be necessary. A vaulting jump through one of those windows would start him on his way to the dock and the Jamaica ship. The blacks would be forced to fight and run fast to catch him.

He scanned the calendar in a hasty glance. The pages for the last few days were filled with Duke Richard's close script. Notations for appointments with various staff officers, John Forsythe found; inspection of the harbor forts, the town arsenal and reservoir. But the page for today, October nineteenth, 1820, was empty; and nothing at all had been marked down on the pages that came after it. Duke Richard was both a very careless and confident man, John Forsythe surmised.

He replaced the calendar, stood with his limber, long-legged body taut as he gazed up at the enormous oil painting on the wall behind the desk. It was a portrait of King Henri of Haiti, posed in his coronation robes, a white ermine cape about the tremendous shoulders, gold chains at the throat and the massive crown lifting above the proud black face. Henri was the last of that group of fierce former slaves who had driven Napoleon's armies from Haiti. But in August of this year Henri had suffered a paralytic stroke. He was confined, almost completely crippled, to his palace. It might not be long now, John Forsythe pondered, before Henri also fell from power. . . .

WITH his hand close to his sword hilt, his senses acutely strained for the sound of the opening door, he went to stare out of the window.

The cobbled, wide Place d'Armes was deserted, quite silent in the midday

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

heat. Beyond before the barracks gate hulking Negroes in the garish uniforms and high shakos of King Henri's grenadiers paced evenly. In the barracks courtyard the black soldiers were still gathering and falling into ranks. Officers stood before them, oddly smiling, fingering sword knots and belts. Non-coms went along the files and rationed shot and powder to each man.

John Forsythe wanted to curse, wanted to go and find the yellow-skinned secretary, to shake him by the neck until the truth came out of him. There had been no bugle call of assembly for those troops; no orders were spoken now. All of it had been done very quietly in the few minutes since he had entered this room. This was King Henri's chief port and town. Yet the governor-general, Duke Richard, was absent while supposedly loyal troops armed themselves for the march and for combat.

"Don't be a bloody fool," John Forsythe thought. "Keep still. Wait for Richard. Whatever this is that is going on out there but doubles your suspicion of the man."

He was standing, apparently idly waiting in the middle of the room when the door opened. The secretary poised in the doorway. "Duke Richard of Limonade," he said and stepped back.

Duke Richard was tall and handsome, with a mulatto's regular features and tawny skin. He was clad in a gleaming court uniform of white and gold, and John Forsythe saw that the knees of the satin breeches were freshly saddle-stained.

"Allow me," John Forsythe said. "I have letters here from Admiral Sir Home Riggs Popham, late commander of the West Indian Fleet."

Duke Richard bowed as he took the letters. "I know Sir Home very well," he said in accentless English. "I am very sorry if I have kept you waiting."

John Forsythe gave him a smile that was politely blank. "I have not been waiting more than a few minutes," he said. He watched with fixed tensity as Duke Richard broke the seals and read the letter. But when the other looked up, his dark eyes were calm and inscrutable. This was a bad and a dangerous man, John Forsythe knew, and one it would pay to watch. . . .

"I thought," Duke Richard said, "when I first saw you, you were only another young European officer willing to sell his sword to King Henri. And we have had too many of those already." He indicated Forsythe's neat gray broadcloth with a graceful, half-apologetic gesture; then eyed the long sword. "It is seldom that we in Haiti see a gentleman in civilian clothing who carries a sword with such obvious authority."

John Forsythe smiled with an effort. How much, he asked below his breath, does this man think I know? Aloud, he said, "I think Sir Home's letters explain themselves."

"They are quite explicit," Duke Richard said. "You are on leave from your regiment in Jamaica. Your fiancée, Miss Leah Stewart, is staying with her uncle, the King's physician, at the royal palace. The purpose of your visit is to get Miss Stewart to return with you to Jamaica as your regiment is due to be recalled soon to England. Sir Home implies that you wish to marry the young lady."

"Quite," John Forsythe said. His glance was level, hard.

DUKE RICHARD sat back and shut his eyes. "You must know that Dr. Stewart as the King's physi-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cian is one of the intimates at court. I have had the honor of meeting his niece several times. Let me congratulate you upon your fiancée's charm and beauty. But—" he sighed—"it is impossible for me to accede at this time to Sir Home's friendly request and give you a pass to go out to the palace at Milot. Foreigners are forbidden at any time to go beyond the city limits, except with a special pass. I am so very sorry. But if I may serve you in any other way?"

John Forsythe took his time in answering. He summoned to his brain the vision of Leah Stewart and the knowledge of how much he loved her.

Leah had come to Haiti for her own reasons. Those were the words she had used to him in parting, weeping softly as she said them. She had called him her great, darling dunce, the Scottish burr rich in her voice, her slim hands against his cheeks. "You must wait, John," she had said in a whisper. "It's a fine trick for a man like you to learn, that o' waiting. . . . "

He wrenched his thoughts back from Leah Stewart and turned them to contemplate the man before him. His muscles ached with the desire to reach across the desk and grasp Duke Richard by the throat. The man was an outright traitor, who hated King Henri with all the venom of his soul, and plotted immediate rebellion. That much was obvious.

But there was great danger for Leah out there at that strange black court of Henri's. And he must think of Leah first. John Forsythe made up his mind. "Thank you," he said to Duke Richard. "But as I recollect, one of those letters is addressed personally to His Majesty, King Henri."

Duke Richard glanced at him without saying anything. "Unfortunately, His Majesty is a very busy man, and cannot be bothered by such matters at the moment." They strode side by side towards the door as Duke Richard spoke. John Forsythe made himself keep his hands clenched in his deep coat pockets.

From the Place d'Armes he could hear the quick, regular tread of booted feet over cobbles, the creak of equipment straps, all the familiar sounds of a column of armed men moving at the double-quick. The men who had been gathered in the barracks courtyard a few minutes ago were ready and on their way. . . .

"Let me suggest," Duke Richard said, "if you wish to stay here in the city that you put up at His Majesty's guest house. I understand that the next ship doesn't sail for some days yet. You will find the guest house a pleasant place, and the gentlemen there, with the exception of a few former Prussian officers, are excellent company. I again express regret, but you are also a military man who must understand that duty comes first, always. . . . "

"Always," John Forsythe echoed. His eyes measured Duke Richard slowly. One blow to the chin, he thought, or the sword point through the gullet, would teach this swine what duty is—and now a man is true to it. But Leah was out there; Leah was *his* great duty now. "Thank you, your Grace," he murmured. "You are very kind."

HALF a dozen young men sprawled about the broad veranda of the guest house as John Forsythe arrived in Duke Richard's carriage. They gazed at him with incurious eyes as he mounted the steps. From the room beyond he heard the rattle and slap of a dice cup, the clink of a bottle neck against glasses. The house-boy had gone on in with his box, but Forsythe

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chose to linger a little here before following. These men might tell him a good deal that he needed to know.

Four of them sat together, he noticed, wearing the military jackboots and undress tunics and bright breeches of King Henri's army.

"Which way," he asked them, casually, "did that column of men turn when it left town?"

The nearest young man stood slowly and laughed. "Down the Limbé road," he said. "Right past here. . . . You're the British marine off this morning's ship, hey? Von Koll is my name; former Captain of the Prussian Guard, former Major of the Haitian Guard. These other three chaps, too. We've been out since the Peace of 1815. Waterloo, you remember. . . . Come. Have a drink."

John Forsythe bought them several drinks. The former Prussian guardsmen, he found, were already a little drunk. "Nothing else to do," Von Koll drawled. "Their black king out there hired us and paid us for a while. Used us as training officers. Then damned if he didn't boot us all out. Said flatly he didn't trust us and we could whistle for the rest of our pay. Nice chap, this Henri, when he gets into a rage. We're really prisoners here until we can get a ship home."

He stared at John Forsythe with blue, cold eyes. "If you've the idea you can get out there to the palace somehow to see your girl, forget it right now. Last week a lot of Henri's crack troops revolted down at Saint Marc. Henri is crippled . . . through! The fellow you just left, Duke Richard, is the man now. Henri has his Royal Dahomey Guard out at the palace and his troops up in the citadel behind. But Richard has all else."

John Forsythe fought down his impatience and his eagerness. "Are all the prisoners as well informed as you gentlemen?" he murmured, smiling a little, politely.

The red-faced Prussians laughed in chorus and Von Koll slapped him on the back. "Look," Von Koll said, sweeping a hand out to where, below the house, the broad white road led arrow-straight through the city gates across the green expanse of the Plaine du Nord. John Forsythe followed it with his eyes to the distant gleam of the sun on the red-tiled roofs of the palace of Sans Souci. Up beyond, like a gigantic fist thrust against the sky, the vast gray bulk of the fortifications of the citadel reared sheer from the jungle crest. "Henri calls it the Royal Road," Von Koll said. "Everything that counts in this country passes along it. We just sit here and watch the show."

"Quite nice," John Forsythe said. He rose and walked to the veranda edge. When he turned, Von Koll was beside him. The Prussian smiled faintly and drawled, "No country now for a man who doesn't know his way about, *wissen Sie?*"

John Forsythe smiled in return. "I have fifty good gold English guineas in my belt for a horse and guide. Do you know of a man, Von Koll?"

"He's standing in front of you," Von Koll said. "But to get past the sentries at the city gate you'll need a Haitian uniform and the password. If you're caught, the man who helped you gets shot. Seventy-five guineas is a much better price."

"Done." John Forsythe held the rage and contempt out of his voice. "Get me a cape and cap, and a decent horse."

"The stable is in back," the Prussian said. "I'll meet you there in five minutes. You'll have to leave your traveling-box here."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MIMOSA and scarlet hibiscus were high over the garden wall at the back of the house. John Forsythe scratched himself badly as he climbed it to reconnoiter the stable yard behind. Von Koll stood at the stable door talking in a low voice with a groom. Inside the stable were two saddled horses. But down the driveway were other horses, also saddled, and Von Koll's three brother officers were astride them. They held pistols in their hands.

A feeling of outright relief came over John Forsythe. Here, finally, was action. Those three men out there were waiting to trap and kill him. Duke Richard must have taken him for a very stupid fellow to be taken in so easily, he thought, dropping over the wall. He made his way silently to the stable.

His sword made a dry little sound as he pulled it from the scabbard. Von Koll and the groom wheeled around. Von Koll reached for a pistol in a saddle holster. Then the point of John Forsythe's sword touched his throat, and Von Koll raised his hands slowly, looking baffled and a little grim. "Mount," John Forsythe commanded after he had taken Von Koll's pistol, and tied up the groom. "You're riding ahead of me, Captain. Of course, I shan't pay you a copper now. Too bad to lose the seventy-five guineas. . . . Where is that cape?"

The cape and a cockaded shako of a Haitian chasseur regiment lay on top of a feed box. John Forsythe donned them hastily. With his sword point against Von Koll's back he swung up onto a big gray. "Back your beast out," he said. "Gallop all the way. Slow up, and I'll run you through. Turn right! Your friends are waiting to the left. Unfortunate I happened to see them—and guess what they were waiting for."

Their horses sprang forward as the spurs bit their flanks, Von Koll, leading, swerved to the right and the Royal Road. Behind them, the other Prussians, seeing their scheme thus miscarrying, wheeled, shooting.

Bullets cracked over John Forsythe's shoulders. He raised up, laughing in his saddle, feeling the rush of the horse under him and the wind pelting in his face.

VON KOLL'S horse sent the first sentry at the city gate sprawling in the road. The sergeant and the rest of the guard merely stood and yelled after they had vainly emptied their guns. John Forsythe slowed down the gray a couple of hundred yards along the road, called to Von Koll. "Well ridden," he told the Prussian. "I imagine I shall be seeing you again if you can make Duke Richard understand your failure."

Von Koll had drawn his mount to the side of the road, and remained rigidly silent. When John Forsythe looked back another furlong further on, the four Prussian officers were formed in a small, confused group at the city gate. Well one attempt to have his life had failed. It was a richly comforting thought.

John Forsythe met no one on the Royal Road except a few barefoot and gaping peasants. His anxiety and impatience increased a little with each foot of the way. It was no great sign of good fortune, he well knew, that Duke Richard's forces had not shown themselves here. The thought of Leah returned to him, and he pushed the gray hard.

He was within a couple of miles of Milot and the palace, when a vedette patrol under a black corporal of King Henri's troops picked him up. It was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

full dark when they swung in between the low double row of buildings leading to the palace. He saw it dimly, a pale and immense shadow beyond a crescent-shaped series of stone sentry boxes and terraces where fountains lifted and splashed with a cool sound. He waited in the guard-house for what seemed to him to be a very long time before Leah came.

She entered alone and stopped a pace or so from him. She wore a low-cut gown of some flowered, silken stuff, and her reddish golden hair was piled high on her head. John Forsythe's heart contracted and his hands trembled as he saw her.

She held him off for a moment with the ivory handle of her fan against his chest. "I knew it was you," she said, "although they had your name all wrong. Have you been fighting, John?"

He lifted her clear of the floor to kiss her. But she would not rest long in his arms, and he was forced to answer her. "Not worth the telling," he said. "Not now. You're all right? And your uncle, the doctor?"

She took him by the arm while they went up to the palace. "Fine, John," she said. "We are fine. My uncle is with the King. But what has brought you? Whom have you been fighting, John?"

"Careless lads," John Forsythe said. He held her back briefly. "Sir Home sent me, before he left for England. He ordered me to come directly from Jamaica should anything happen to Henri here."

"Sir Home," she said very softly, "might have known better."

"Duke Richard has sent—" John Forsythe began.

Her fingers lifted against his lips. "The Scots call a man like you a *nyaff*, John. For you would fight all the world."

"A *nyaff*," he said, "is a way of saying a fool. The chaps I fought today are fools. They thought they had me. . . ."

She stood close and gazed into his eyes, her breath stilled. He saw that her face was suddenly drawn and quite pale. "So," she whispered, "our Duke Richard has already started." She took him tightly by the wrists. "You must tell the King of this now, John."

THEY sat in silence on a carved stone bench at the terrace end while they waited for the return of the page she had sent to the King. John Forsythe tried to speak several times, but Leah's fingers or her lips against his own silenced him.

"Go now," she said finally. "The page is there. My uncle will introduce you to the King. Remember you can only trust the people you meet in the King's room. Do not be long; the King is sick and tired. I shall have some dinner ready for you when you are through. Come back here to me."

The small Negro page went before him along the magnificent corridors, stopped abruptly and, without knocking, opened a door. John Forsythe stepped into a blaze of light falling from half a dozen chandeliers. Suddenly he felt all his weariness, and was painfully aware that his clothing was lather-splashed, his hands and face unclean.

The room before him was vast, floored and paneled with mahogany. Huge tapestries and gilt-framed pictures were on the walls. At the far end a group of men stood about an enormous gilded chair. In that brilliant light he recognized Doctor Duncan Stewart's tall, stooped form, and some of his nervous uneasiness left him.

The man who occupied the gilded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

chair was Henri Christophe, King of Haiti. Forsythe's heels met with a sharp click.

Doctor Stewart advanced and took his hand. "I am glad you are here," he said. "His Majesty wishes to meet you."

King Henri sat high up in the thronelike chair. He held his blunt head back. John Forsythe was able to stare full into the wide, dark eyes as the Scottish doctor made the presentation. Seeing Henri, he could understand, John Forsythe told himself, how this man had made himself king. The strength, the sheer, brute power of him, was plainly to be seen in his hands and keen, cold gaze, in the mobile and yet fiercely controlled broad face.

King Henri wore a close-fitting tunic of deep blue, frogged and leafed with gold. But the lower part of his body was covered with a robe, and he did not move when John Forsythe bowed. He let several seconds pass before he spoke, then his words came, level and in clear English. "You are of Sir Home's men?"

"I served under Sir Home when he was on the West Indian station, Your Majesty. When I arrived this morning, I had a letter to you, personally addressed by Sir Home. But they took that and all my other papers from me at the Cape."

Very slowly, as though with extreme difficulty, Henri turned his head. His glance met the eyes of the two yellow-skinned men who stood there. "Baron Dupuy," he said. "Baron Vastey. I present Lieutenant Forsythe. The lieutenant seems to have some news."

The two mulattos bowed in unison, and the smaller of them, Baron Dupuy, smiled quickly. "Concerning Duke Richard, perhaps, Lieutenant?" he asked.

"More than three hundred men of Duke Richard's forces left the Cape this noon," John Forsythe said. "They were in full marching order and took the Limbé road out of the city."

An odd, brief sound of laughter came from the huge black man seated in the chair. His lips had drawn back from his teeth and his eyes held a savage and somehow awful light. "Richard wastes no time," he said. "He told you that he was here at the palace this morning, Lieutenant?"

"He did not say so, but I guessed as much, Your Majesty." John Forsythe could not take his eyes from Henri's face. "I had a bit of byplay with four young Prussian gentlemen before I could get clear of the guest house and on my way. One fellow named Von Koll has a smooth tongue, but is not nearly so expert with a pistol."

Doctor Stewart spoke quietly. "I think, Your Majesty, that you should not tire yourself any more. If you wish, I shall talk further with the lieutenant, or Baron Dupuy can continue the conversation. It is time you rested."

Henri made no answer. His head was lowered forward on his chest, his eyes were almost shut. From under the edge of the robe his hand lifted to make a gesture toward the door. Without a word, John Forsythe bowed and turned away.

Doctor Stewart opened the door for him and said quickly, "I believe Leah has dinner waiting. I shall join you later."

A CONSUMING rage whose cause he did not clearly understand blazed through John Forsythe as he returned along the corridors to Leah Stewart. She sat at a corner of the table in the tremendous dining room

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where a liveried black butler was arranging a platter of cold meat and fruit, a tray full of bottles.

"What is the matter, John?" she asked when the butler had served and gone. "What did they tell you?"

John Forsythe laughed then and opened his clenched hands upon the crested silk tablecloth. "Nothing," he said. "Absolutely nothing, while Richard gathers the arms and the men and the advantage. Why doesn't the King attack? Why doesn't he *send* the troops from here and from the citadel and go down and sweep Richard and the rest of those mutinous wood-lice into the sea?"

Leah Stewart frowned at him. "Finish your dinner, John. One would take you for a Highlander for all your fine frenzies. If you cannot eat more, will you hold your breath whilst I pour you a brandy? Now drink it." He shoved the plates away from him, took the brandy glass. "It's I who must tell you," she murmured, "although I was hoping Duncan Stewart would do that for me. . . . That man in there—Henri—is not done yet, and nor is the time for fighting ready. To be sure, the King is crippled and desperate, and Richard and the others have turned against him. But we here must wait. You would bring the whole world stamping in here tomorrow."

"I would take a hundred men out tonight and bring Richard back on a pole before dawn," John Forsythe said.

"And there you're wrong," she said. "Listen, John. In these last years Henri has made a great place of this country. He has made the black men work, made them and their country rich. He has built this place and the citadel, and made schools and roads. Up there in the citadel he has stored away thirty millions of dollars in gold. When Sir Home Popham was last here, he took out six millions in specie to be placed in the bank of England in the name of Henri's Queen. Haiti is a wealthier place now than when the French were here. It's the prize of all the West Indian islands and many folks would like to get their greedy hands upon it."

"They soon will," John Forsythe muttered, "unless the chaps here leave off their talk for a bit of fighting."

"You're more of a stubborn man than an outright fool," she said. "So I must tell you. You ken Lord Palmerston in London; you know the men who run England now. It is they who sent my uncle here, and then sent me to join him as a teacher for Henri's daughters. Because Henri dislikes all foreigners and thinks them spies, he will have no embassies from foreign powers here at court. His one great fear is always that the French will come to try to take Haiti back. Yet Henri has got to trust my uncle as a physician, and a friend. Through my uncle, Sir Home Popham came here to court several times."

"For what purpose?" John Forsythe asked. "England wants Haiti, too, eh?"

"You make sense now," Leah Stewart said. "Henri has learned to like and trust England. All the trade goes to us. And that thirty millions in gold stored up in the citadel has been put aside by Henri to buy the Spanish part of the island and bring it under his rule. The deal is almost done now; in a few weeks more it will be finished. Then England as Henri's trusted friend will make a permanent and binding treaty of friendship with Haiti. English ships will use the ports, duty free. Our fleets will be able to anchor safely here. England will all but own the finest island in the whole West Indies. It must be done very quietly, you see, and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

without bloodshed, lest Europe learn of it, and France and the rest find out what is going on. They would fight to keep it from us. Once it is done, then we can laugh at them. But now, we are forced to play a waiting game."

John Forsythe shrugged his shoulders and sipped his brandy. "And Richard," he said, "will come and steal the palace while we wait. With a hundred men tonight, I——"

"Hush," she told him. She had looked out through the doorway beyond, where Doctor Stewart was strolling the far terrace, the ember of his cigar glowing pale in the darkness. "Tomorrow morning Henri is calling an assembly of all his troops. He will pass them in review here at ten o'clock. My uncle has been working on him, and they have even brought in a *bocor,* a Negro witch doctor, to massage his limbs. Henri plans to stand and walk and ride before his troops tomorrow. Then they'll fight for him if it's necessary, and pitch your Duke Richard in the sea."

John Forsythe let out a burst of deep, pleased laughter, and made as though to reach out for Leah and bring her to him. But her raised hands fended him off, struck glancingly against the brandy glass on the table edge, spilled the liquor in a broad stain down the front of his coat.

"Ah," she said, "I've done it now. But handling you is like handling a great brute bear, John. Give me the coat and I shall have it cleaned for you during the night. It's time you were in bed in any case."

She helped him remove the coat, and then she kissed him lightly, and wheeled him around toward the door.

"The page will show you to your room," she said. "You would sleep with that sword beneath your pillow?"

"Tonight, I would," John Forsythe said. "If I sleep at all. . . ."

SHE stayed there by the table after he had gone, and it was several minutes before her uncle came silently across the dewy grass.

"If I loved the man less," she whispered to him, "I could not do this. But he is the only one of whom we can be sure if things here go wrong tomorrow. Certainly, you and I would be searched, and all the others, even the Queen. But after the way he thrust his head into the lions' den at the Cape today, Richard would not for a moment believe that we would dare use our lieutenant of marines as a bearer of anything of consequence. And were I to tell John what we wished him to do, his face and his manner would show it at once; he'd ride hell-for-leather right into the thickest danger. The man is an open, simple soldier, nothing else, and I love him for it. But this way I can keep him at my side, see him safely through. You have everything here?"

Doctor Stewart slid from inside his frilled shirt a sheaf of papers flatly bound in oilskin. "The drafts of our treaty with the Spanish, the letters from the Spanish governor and all our own documents. Enough to break the Peace of 1815 into a thousand bits and start half of Europe into a war with us if it falls into the wrong hands. You're certain of your soldier, Leah? You can sew this packet into the lining of his coat so that it will not show?"

She nodded, her eyes somber. "My John Forsythe has a tailor in London who reckoned on the spread of his customer's shoulders. Before he learns the packet is there, he will be on board ship for England, and then I shall have to tell him. It will please him to learn how he has helped to keep the peace."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"A good task for a soldier," Doctor Stewart said. "The best I can think for him now. The rest is for Henri to do—if we can get the man to stand upon his feet."

"You think it will be possible?" Leah Stewart asked.

The tall doctor shook his head. "Tomorrow," he said, "will tell. Nothing else."

THEY dressed Henri in his finest white and blue uniform, and then four strapping soldiers of his Royal Dahomey regiment carried him from the palace to the terrace in the great gilded chair. Bugles were blowing in the barracks below. Troops were forming all along the narrow valley down to the Royal Road.

"Some companies are not there," Leah Stewart whispered. She stood close to John Forsythe in the morning sunlight and her hand was unconsciously tight on his arm. "But there are yet enough left who admire and obey him. If now he can show them his strength. . . ."

John Forsythe only nodded; he was watching Henri. He had slept miserably, tossing all night.

Up from the stables, a groom was leading the King's famous white horse. He halted the animal six paces from where Henri sat. Doctor Stewart, the shy, dark little Queen and the two young Princesses stood behind the chair. At their backs were gathered a press of the court people, and the Royal Prince, burly Victor-Henri, all of them wordless and very still, their eyes fixed upon the King.

Henri flicked away the robe which covered his legs. His tremendous black hands gripped the arms of the chair, and slowly he pulled himself erect. A low, strangely sighing sound came from the crowd and from the troops grouped down the slope. Henri stood—without aid! He was moving with wide, stiff strides to his horse. The spontaneous burst of cheering from the troops made a wild clamor that rang through the sunlit valley.

Never, John Forsythe thought, standing with Leah close beside him, had he seen such pure, concentrated courage. It was as though the huge black man there fought against unseen and malevolently powerful giants. Yet Henri's head was up; a smile carved his face, his eyes were wide. The muscles tightened all along John Forsythe's back as he watched; he wanted to yell out and cheer, to stride forward to Henri's aid. Yet he stood still, with Leah's hand on his arm. This was Henri's fight and no one's else; Henri had a king's fight to combat the demons of his fate alone. . . .

He had reached the saddle to mount. His fingers gripped the rich leather. His muscles quivered and convulsed along his arms. His breath made a whistling, terrible sound.

Then his knees, his body buckled. He slipped and fell, sideward, down, beneath the horse. His huge half-moon hat with its white ostrich plume spilled from his head. He lay twisted up, motionless.

John Forsythe had bitten his lower lip until the blood ran. His fingernails had cut deep into his palms; he could no longer see very clearly.

"Oh, my God," Leah Stewart whispered at his side. Her eyes were closed and tears trickled from beneath their lids. "Oh, my God . . . The man's courage, John, and his pride . . ."

"Be still," John Forsythe whispered back. "That man can always be proud. He'd laugh hell's doors off their hinges."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Doctor Stewart and Vastey and Dupuy had run forward to the King. They helped him up and carried him back to the chair. Tears were on their cheeks, but they smiled—smiled at Henri. In this moment their master had passed from being a common man and become something of a weird, magnificent god.

AT the head of the column, an officer turned with his sword high and yelled a command at the troops. They strode along the terrace with the precision Henri had taught them. They wheeled past the King cheering and shouting his name. But as they turned beyond, John Forsythe saw that they broke ranks, and that the first files were already running down the Royal Road toward the Cape. Their officers did not stop them; but stood staring blankly.

A rough, deep shout started in John Forsythe's throat, became savage laughter. "I'll stop them," he said half aloud. "I'll turn them back and parade them on their hands and knees! The scum—don't they know a man and their King when they see him?"

"Come away," Leah Stewart said to him. "Come into the palace. There is nothing you can do here now, or I. . . ." She spoke with difficulty, and all the color had gone out of her face. She stumbled as she walked.

John Forsythe put his arm about her and cursed beneath his breath. "If there's nothing to be done," he muttered, "let's get out of here. Go pack your things while I fetch a pair of horses. You'll not let me be a soldier, so I must play the lover."

They had entered into one of the big state chambers, and she turned and stood right before him. "Understand me, John," she said. "There's a task I have to do before I leave that cannot be accomplished without you. Your talk's all of soldiering, but Sir Home sent you out here to do anything you could for King Henri. So find your patience. This is not finished yet."

The rest of that day was all but unbearable for John Forsythe. He paced the room countless times, and questioned Leah Stewart, in a savage mood, angrier and more difficult than any she had ever seen him in. "It's not like a man," he repeated, "to sit here and do nothing. . . ."

Once Doctor Stewart came, with a bottle of whisky and a plate of sandwiches. One of the black generals, he admitted to John Forsythe, had taken the last loyal troops down the Royal Road to meet Richard's men. All the others were gone. Richard was moving in from the Cape, but there was no reason to worry yet; Richard was no fighting man.

Dusk spread lavender and pale green through the room when John Forsythe heard the hoofbeats up the paved way from the Royal Road. "That would be a messenger back from the lads who went to fight Richard," he said.

Leah Stewart joined him at the window, her steadying fingers on his arm. Then she recognized the bloodied, vacantly staring face of the man who rode toward the palace. "Joachim," she said. "The man who led them out to fight. . . . The others—didn't come back."

"And you held me here," John Forsythe growled. "You kept me from it." But she had stepped past to the door and he went after her.

There was no one in the lower halls and they had mounted to the second floor and the entrance to Henri's private suite before they found Doctor Stewart. An open door gave onto a balcony, and they could see Henri sit-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ting there with the Queen, and up across the sky from the Plaine du Nord the carmine glare of blazing buildings. Drums pattered in the night, their sound broken and fretted by yells and shots from the Royal Road.

Doctor Stewart nodded as he met John Forsythe's eyes. "Nearly all of them deserted to Richard," the doctor said. "Joachim was lucky to get away alive. Come in. The King wishes to speak with you."

"We can't move him to the citadel?" John Forsythe asked, "and fight from there? They'd never take it!"

"The King," Doctor Stewart said, "will tell you what he wishes to be done."

Henri rested like a statue of carved ebony; only his eyes seemed alive. "You have been very good to stay," he said to Leah Stewart and John Forsythe. "But there is little more to do. I want the Queen and my son and daughters taken out to the coast and made safe. I have here the papers for the money Sir Home Popham took to the Bank of England for the Queen. They are tremendously important; without them, she will not be able to use that fund. Right now, it would be far too dangerous for her to carry them herself. I entrust them to you, Lieutenant. Doctor Stewart has promised to see that everything else is arranged. Let me thank you now, and wish you goodbye."

Leah Stewart could not speak, and John Forsythe said hoarsely, "Goodbye, Your Majesty."

THE papers Henri had given him were crumpled in his hand and he was holding them like that when he caught up with Leah in the hall. She was weeping openly and he took her in his arms. But the sobs stopped against his shoulder and she plucked away the papers he clasped.

"In your hands they'd become something no Bank of England clerk could ever read," she murmured. "Come. I must speak with the Queen."

The little Queen stood before the door of Henri's room. Her face was blank, dulled by grief. The door was shut behind her, and Doctor Stewart and the others waited down the hall.

The Queen made a short, fumbling gesture with her hands when she saw Leah Stewart. "He has sent me away," she told the girl. "He told me that he wishes to be alone. He has pulled himself up onto his bed somehow, and he is lying there. . . ."

Leah Stewart placed her hand on the Queen's arm. She spoke gently, and almost as though she would to a child emerging from an awful nightmare. "We must leave him now," she said. "As he has asked."

They were moving slowly along the hall to where the others stood when the muffled, single report came from Henri's room.

"Excuse me," Doctor Stewart said, and then remembered to bow before he ran back along the hall.

John Forsythe felt no clear, single emotion in the next few minutes. There it is, he thought. It's all over now, all the planning and the dreaming and the fighting. Everything that one simple, unlettered black man with his courage and his will and hope has tried to do for the others who were slaves with him . . . all of it, ends like this. The man in there named himself king; he fought to bring his people up from nothing, and they feared and hated him because of his strength and because of his pride. . . . This is how he had to come to the end of his Royal Road. His glory road . . .

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Turning gradually, John Forsythe looked at the others in the hall. The knowledge of defeat, of desperate finality, was there, imprinted on their strained, shocked faces, writ dark in their staring eyes. Henri had been a symbol to all of them, black or white—because he'd battled fate all his life, because he'd been calm before death. And the rest, somehow, didn't count. . . .

DOCTOR STEWART opened the door and gazed with haggard, quiet eyes at John Forsythe. The power of emotion was quite exhausted in the doctor; he was resigned and stoic now; he had tight hold of himself. "Through the forehead," he said tonelessly. "There was a pistol in the table beside the bed. Years ago, he had a gold bullet made—for this. But it was the best way. He knew, and he made me understand that it was so before I left him.' '

The Queen had brushed into the room, and with her the Princesses and Victor-Henri. Her weeping made John Forsythe feel as if hot knife-blades were pressing against his own eyeballs.

"We cannot leave his body here," she said. "They . . . they who are coming—" She got control of herself again and nodded to her son. "You will take Victor-Henri down to the coast as the King asked you, Doctor. Baron Dupuy and Joachim will go with you. My daughters and Baron Vastey and I will take the King up to the citadel. He will be safe there forever, and those troops who are loyal will care for us. And there is still time . . ."

"But you will meet us on the coast in the morning, Your Majesty?" Doctor Stewart said.

"We shall meet you on the coast," she said.

Doctor Stewart went along the hall with Leah and John Forsythe. "You two must leave together now," he told them. "Leah knows the place where we are all to meet on the coast. My task is to get Victor-Henri out; the lad is the royal heir, and somehow we may be able to get him back on his father's throne." They shook hands then and Doctor Stewart kissed his niece. "Don't worry about me," he said.

"Go fetch your horses now, John," Leah Stewart said. "Bring them to the side door, just below."

When she ran down the steps, wearing a dove-gray riding cape, to where John Forsythe waited with a pair of big English horses from the royal stables, she had a small, heavy bag in one hand that she would not relinquish to him as he helped her mount. "The Queen's jewels," she said. "I am taking them for her. You will be wanting to brandish that great brute sword of yours before long. So you'd best keep your hands free. Take this path here—not the Royal Road."

For a while they could hear yelling and the crash of shots from the palace behind as they trotted along the jungle path. Then suddenly they came out upon the Royal Road, and John Forsythe saw that dawn would not be long in rising over the sea. Close in alongshore a small lugger-rigged craft beat back and forth. He swung in the saddle then. Perhaps a hundred yards beyond, between them and the beach path, was a group of four mounted men. It was the quartet of Prussians, with Von Koll in the lead. So Duke Richard was not finished with them yet.

"CLEVERER this time," John Forsythe murmured. The rage he had been holding back for days welled

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and became a black, furious flood within him. Men like these had killed Henri. Men who lacked honor and pride and any sort of real courage.

Here was his answer to a part of what had happened, a small target for some of his hate and rage.

He looked at Leah Stewart. "Ride behind me," he told her. "Keep right on going. I have two pistols here, and my sword. They'll get their fill of me."

Leah Stewart's answer was to strike her horse with both heels and send the beast into a wild gallop. John Forsythe was quick, but she had a start of several yards. The four Prussians had spread out across the road, blocking it solidly from the ditch on one side to the high cactus hedge on the other. It seemed that Leah Stewart intended to drive full-tilt at them, and they reared their mounts back, drew their pistols level.

The cactus hedge was a full six feet high, yet Leah Stewart wheeled her horse and flung him squarely at it off the paved road. The beast skidded, lunged, and jumped crashing through the hedge and was free in the open field leading to the beach.

A shout came from one of the Prussians, and he was pointing down at the road. Gems from the sack Leah Stewart had carried and dropped as she rushed the hedge were spilled in a gleaming stream on the paving. The early light glistened upon emeralds, diamonds and thick ropes of pearls.

John Forsythe laughed as he pulled free his sword and one of his pistols. "You'll have more than that, square-head!" he grunted. "Here's a little steel to cool your blood before breakfast." Then he was silent, and the vision of Henri's tortured face and eyes flicked like a wire whip across his memory. He rode with his body lifted in the saddle, taut and poised.

Two of the Prussians were down in the road, scooping at the gems. They screamed and began to run. John Forsythe flailed them with two sword blows apiece, cursing as his horse leapt aside at the sight of the brightly gushing blood. But Von Koll and the other man were still mounted. John Forsythe fired a snap shot, hit the man behind Von Koll in the shoulder. Then Von Koll was at him, and their sabers met and clashed, grating.

Von Koll had a cavalry saber which he used expertly. John Forsythe was reckless, quite insane with his hatred and desire to kill. He and Von Koll were fighting knee to knee across the road when one of the other Prussians fired a pistol shot. The bullet killed John Forsythe's horse instantly. It dropped where it stood. He rolled clear of the beast, was standing crouched when he saw Leah Stewart coming back through the hedge.

She had drawn a little dueling pistol from inside her cloak, fired it almost point-blank at the nearest Prussian. The man pitched backward and Von Koll turned his head to look. John Forsythe sprang to rip Von Koll from the saddle. He hit him with his hands and the guard of his broken sword. He gripped him by the throat until Von Koll suddenly stopped kicking . . . and breathing.

The fourth Prussian was trying to remount. With a jerking motion he drove his sword at John Forsythe. "So?" John Forsythe asked. He took Von Koll's saber and ran him neatly through the throat.

"Now, John," Leah said, "pick up the jewels. But be quick. Doctor Stewart and the others are waiting for us on the beach."

John Forsythe cursed as he refilled the velvet bag; then went on beside her

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to the beach and the boat that was waiting there. "You'll keep those?" Leah asked.

"Until I meet the Queen," he said. "You'd no need to drop them and then come back. You were safe away. The Queen's papers to the Bank of England money must be stuffed away somewhere in your boot. I reckoned you'd drop the jewels, and then keep on going. The Prussian lads were my job."

For an instant she stared in silence at his broad back and the small lump the precious sheaf of state papers made inside the spread of cloth across his shoulders. Up until this moment, she had loved John Forsythe deeply; but from now on she would share her every thought with him.

"There's something, John," she said, "that I shall tell you when we're out to sea."

"That you'll marry me right away?" John Forsythe asked, the grin wide across his tanned face.

"No," she said, and smiled back at him, gently. "I decided that a long time ago."

Puppets For Moppets

AT New York's Bellevue Hospital, Dr. Loretta Bender and Adolf G. Woltman are giving Punch and Judy shows, only it is not authentic Punch and Judy, for the entrepreneurs are psychologists, the hero's name is Caspar, and the audience is the real show.

When you shout, "Kill the umpire!" at a baseball game you are identifying yourself with members of one of the two opposing teams. The same transference of identity occurs in the theatre, or at the movies. Your own emotions gradually become involved with the conflicts being presented. Your muscles flex apprehensively as the villain, with mayhem in mind, advances upon the hero—or more ardently, upon little Nell. And perhaps you sigh a little when at last all is well and the last caress dissolves from your sight. You have just been doing a little vicarious living, believe it or not, and if Dr. Bender or Mr. Woltman had been able to observe your reactions to the baseball game, the play, or the movie, one of them would have learned a good deal about the sort of a person you are.

As children are less restrained than their elders, their reactions to the adventures of the psychologists' Caspar (Punch to us) are usually loud, succinct, and, occasionally, violent.

"I need a dime," Caspar, a truant from school, says in the play. "I'm goin' to sneak off to the movie. Shall I take a dime from this girl coming down the street?"

"Take it!" the audience shouts, letting the moral code go hang.

Constantly, during the show, enthusiastic advice of this kind is supplied by the juvenile audience, although there is often a difference of opinion. And this is where the psychologists come in: They divide their charges into classifications that are based upon their answers to Caspar's questions. There is one question, however, to which there has, as yet, been no dissenting opinion. This is when Caspar asks, "Shall I burn the schools?" The answer, say Dr. Bender and Mr. Woltman, is always an emphatic, "Yes!"

—*J. Wentworth Tilden*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Señor Vulture

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY
Author of "Wench Caravan," "Don Peon," etc.

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, a tiny mission town of Old California, shuddered nervously when it heard the news that Marcos Palma, whom men called Señor Vulture, was riding down El Camino Real attended by his ill-visaged body servant, Felipe the Frog.

For wherever Señor Vulture went, he left behind him desolation, despair—and even death. No one knew why he did these things, nor why the Governor had given such a villain letters of marque and free passage through the country. But the truth was that Señor Vulture was the tool of the Governor's ambitions—and the Governor's plan envisaged no lesser thing than the seizure of all mission lands and revenues. To accomplish this, Señor Vulture schemed to get the wealthy landowners in his power, forcing their aid.

NO sooner has Marcos Palma arrived in San Juan Capistrano than the trouble commences. Don Ricardo Rizal, whose engagement to the lovely Señorita Dorotea Cruz has just been celebrated, finds Palma an obnoxious cur, and bluntly tells him so. Swordplay is averted only because Señor Vulture has other plans in mind. These, oddly enough, concern Dorotea's brother, the young, reckless, weak-willed Valentino.

The next morning Valentino is fairly within the net. Señor Vulture coldly announces that not only is Valentino in his debt for a staggering sum—the amount of his gambling losses—but that the third man present at the private gaming *soireé* has been killed.

"And you, my dear Don Valentino," he says, "are the man who killed him. Now I think we should call upon your father. You see, from now on, you—and your father and sister—are going to be most helpful to me."

When Don Ricardo rides to the Cruz *rancho* to greet his bethrothed, he finds her strangely cold. Their engagement is terminated and not a word of explanation can he get from the girl or her father. Don

This story began in the Argosy for June 12

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ricardo, sensing that the taloned hand of Señor Vulture is behind all this, confronts him at the inn. There is a violent altercation in the course of which Don Ricardo seizes up a whip and lashes Señor Vulture with all the force he can muster.

Palma summons the guard and demands that Sergeant Valdez place Ricardo under arrest. But Valdez' reluctance and the timely aid of Juan Bardoso, reformed pirate and innkeeper, give Ricardo a chance to escape. He takes refuge in the mission, under the protection of Fray José, and claims the sanctuary of consecrated ground.

BUT the rule of sanctuary, Palma insists, does not hold in cases of treason, and an attack upon the Governor's emissary is surely treason. Legally, Palma is correct, and he has Don Ricardo neatly caught. When Fray José aids the young gallant to escape, Palma, who has been waiting for just such a chance, orders Sergeant Valdez to arrest the good *fraile*.

Don Ricardo meets Valentino secretly and they resolve upon a plan of action. Dressed as a peon, as part of that plan, Ricardo visits the field-hands' quarters where he finds Felipe the Frog inciting the peons to rebellion. But Felipe is an arrant coward, and Ricardo has little difficulty breaking up the meeting.

Meanwhile Fray José has been sentenced to five lashes for his part in the escape of a traitor. The good Sergeant Valdez is reluctant to carry out the punishment but he receives a mysterious message ordering him to proceed and assuring him that no harm will come to Fray José.

Sitting in front of the inn, Juan Bardoso watches the little procession to the whipping post. Angrily he stamps inside his inn, refusing to watch such a hateful procedure. So Bardoso does not see what happens . . .

CHAPTER XII

THE RESCUERS

EARLY that morning, several riders had traveled with caution toward a little ravine not far from the mission, where they could hide comfortably with their mounts, approaching the place singly and by pairs and threes, careful not to be observed.

Don Ricardo Rizal was one, his eyes flashing and his chin thrust forward in determination, and Don Valentino Cruz another, and the rest were their firm friends, all young *caballeros* eager for the thrill of adventure and relishing the spice of danger.

There were fifteen of them, and they sat in a circle on the ground, their waiting horses behind them, and discussed plans. None was riding his favorite horse, none was dressed quite as usual, and with masks over their faces they would pass without sure identification.

Presently, one left the group to crawl through the brush and watch from a crest, and two others dressed themselves in rags and went down a winding path to approach the mission.

They kept carefully away from all others. But those of San Juan Capistrano were in a state of excitement as they gathered for the trial of Fray José and gave the strange pair no attention.

Sergeant Valdez had all his troopers with him to maintain order, fearing some of the natives might start trouble in a moment of religious frenzy, and there was no guard at barracks or stable.

The two slipped into the stables and untied all the horses and turned them out into the open to scatter, found all the halters and bridles and tossed them into a huge cask half filled with rainwater, the last place a searcher would look.

They skirted the fringe of the gathering throng and listened to the talk, approached a window and heard how the trial was going. They exchanged swift glances when Fray José was sentenced, and got away from the building quickly. Behind an adobe hut, where they could not be seen by those around the barracks, but could be seen by the men watching on the distant crest, they signaled wildly with their arms.

Then they departed swiftly, kicking up a cloud of dust as they hurried along the road to turn into the path which led to the ravine where their horses were tethered. When they arrived, the other *caballeros* were gone. Chuckling, they changed into their proper clothes and waited.

Again, by pairs and threes, the *caballeros* had gone from the ravine to assigned posi-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tions close to the buildings, keeping under cover as much as possible. They watched the procession from the barracks to the whipping post, waiting for a signal.

Between two troopers who did not fancy their task, Fray José was led slowly to the post near the wall. Sergeant Valdez strode behind, keeping the curious at a decent distance with his stares. Señor Marcos Palma thrust his way forward like a man about to enjoy a spectacle, and Felipe the Frog kept a short distance behind him.

Fray José's robe was removed from his emaciated shoulders and his thin body bared to the waist. One of the troopers advanced with thongs, but Valdez motioned for him to wait.

"For what is about to be done, Fray José, I ask you to forgive me," the sergeant said.

"You are forgiven freely, my son. I understand the situation in which you find yourself."

"I am almost tempted to—" the sergeant began.

"You have sworn to do your duty, my friend," Fray José interrupted. "You did not write the laws, neither did you issue the pass to the man who seeks to have those laws interpreted so strictly."

"Is this more defamation?" Marcos Palma cried.

Fray José looked at him with pity. "I even forgive you, señor," he said.

SERGEANT VALDEZ could do nothing more to delay punishment. With a swift glance at the trooper who held the whip, a glance which warned him that his blows should be light, he nodded to the man with the thongs.

"It occurs to me, Sergeant," Marcos Palma said, "that you are not overly eager in carrying out the law. I warn you that I am watching. Since you have cut the usual sentence to a mere five lashes, let those lashes be lusty ones."

Valdez whirled toward him. "I am handling this affair, *señor,*" he snapped. "You appear only as accuser. I ask you for the last time, Señor Palma, to relent and agree that punishment be deferred. Fray José is an elderly man—"

"Old enough to know better than to transgress laws. It appears to me he is deliberately flouting the authority of His Excellency. That he is a *fraile* does not free him from the punishment he merits for treason."

"May it be on your own head, *señor,*" Sergeant Valdez said, and motioned to his men again.

They fastened thongs to Fray José's wrists, put him against the post and made ready to bind him there with his arms stretched above his head. The man who held the whip prepared for his distasteful task.

The natives crowded nearer, the neophytes muttering prayers and the others jeering, and the troopers growled at them and ordered them back.

"Let us get on with it!" Marcos Palma cried.

Down by the adobe warehouse, somebody gave a shout, and those in the crowd paid no attention. The shout brought immediate and astonishing results.

From behind buildings and from places of concealment dashed riders whose faces were masked. They charged from every direction toward the whipping post, yelling a sort of war cry.

The natives screeched and scattered, running wildly to get away from the zone of danger. The troopers stood as though dazed, and Sergeant Valdez for once was without immediate orders for them, something of the truth flashing through his mind.

Down to the whipping post the riders charged, to skid their mounts to a stop in a shower of gravel and dust. Marcos Palma reeled back against the wall to escape flying hoofs. Felipe the Frog sought refuge behind a heap of rocks, for it seemed to him that certain of the riders were paying particular attention to him and his master.

With them the masked men had brought a spirited horse with an empty saddle on

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his back. As blades flashed in the sunshine, warning everybody back, two dismounted quickly, seized Fray José and put him into the empty saddle. They mounted again, grasped the reins, wheeled their horses, rode furiously as they had come, compelling the *fraile* to ride with them.

The others jumped their horses at the troopers and menaced them. A whip sang through the air, and the lash caught Señor Palma across his breast, bringing out a streak of blood. Deafening yells roared into the ears of those against the wall.

Marcos Palma got his firearm out of his girdle, and the whip sang again and jerked it from his hand and sent him reeling backward with a bruised forearm. There was another chorus of yells. In a cloud of dust, the masked riders galloped away, following the two who had taken Fray José.

"After them!" Marcos Palmos shouted at Valdez. "Take all your men, and run them down! Slay them if they resist arrest."

"And for whom shall I look?" Valdez asked. "They were all masked."

"Trail them! Do your duty! Bring them in one by one and sentence them to the rope!"

"To horse!" the sergeant bellowed to his men. It was in his mind that they could lose the trail easily enough when they were a short distance from the mission.

The troopers rushed to barracks and stables, to find that their horses were out in the open and scattered, and that the confusion was frightening them and scattering them more. They ran for halters and bridles, and could find none. Sergeant Valdez did considerable bellowing of orders, which made a din but accomplished nothing, and his eyes were twinkling as he bellowed.

At the crest of the first hill, the masked riders stopped and looked back. Their blades flashed in the sun as they were flourished in mocking salute and returned to their scabbards. Then the riders disappeared, and only a lifting trail of dust revealed in which direction they had gone.

SERGEANT VALDEZ and his men finally caught up their horses, found the bridles and prepared for the trail. They rode furiously until they were out of sight of the mission, then the sergeant slackened the pace and pretended to be looking for trail.

Some of his men could be trusted, and he knew others would betray any laxness of duty on his part, if they thought that by so doing they could win the approval of the Governor's man. So Valdez pretended to be using all his skill, and led his men over the hills until they were bewildered, following cattle trails and those made by natives, but seeing nothing of the masked riders.

It was in the heat of the day when Valdez returned with his men, to report he had failed and to listen to Marcos Palma's enraged bellowings as he strode around the big room at the inn.

"They must be caught and punished!" he howled. "Do you realize they are banded to obstruct justice? No doubt this fine Don Ricardo Rizal is associated with them."

"I could identify none of them, *señor,*" the sergeant said. "In my mind, it was a group of men who resented the whipping of a *fraile* and nothing more."

"The punishment has only been delayed. Fray José rules the mission, and must return and take up his duties. Even if he travels elsewhere, he cannot escape. I'll have him run down!"

"You'll have a stroke, *señor,*" Juan Bardoso warned.

Marcos Palma made no answer. But at that moment remembering the invitation he had received, he said: "I must go to the Cruz *hacienda*. Under the circumstances, Sergeant, I must have an escort."

"I have just returned with my men from riding the hills."

"I must have proper escort," Marcos Palma insisted. "See to it. I'll be ready to start as soon as I have freshened my attire. Let us have no argument about it."

Señor Palma beckoned Felipe the Frog to aid him and went to his room. Valdez

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gave orders to his men, for some to return to barracks and others to get fresh mounts and prepare for escort duty, then sprawled on a bench.

Bardoso, grinning, brought the sergeant wine and sat beside him. No others were near.

It was my opinion that you knew this section of the land well," Bardoso said. "I have heard you boast that you know every rock and bush, where the ground owls nest and the rattlesnakes sound their song. You have told me, while in your cups and boasting, that you could find and follow a trail better than a stinking native."

"And so—?" Valdez asked, glaring at him.

"So, Señor Sergeant, you must be losing your skill. For you to ride abroad and return saying you could not trail almost a score of men—ha!"

"Let us have no talk of it. A man does not like to talk about his failures," the sergeant said.

"Perhaps it is not a failure, *amigo*. I laud you for it. What do you think of this business?"

"Officially, I know nothing. Unofficially, I'd say it was a band of young *caballeros* who intend making themselves nuisances to this Marcos Palma. But I recognized none of their horses, and none of the attire of the riders."

"Wise young *caballeros!*" Bardoso whispered. "They do not flaunt their identities."

"Undoubtedly they will keep me busy—avoiding them," the sergeant said, grinning. "I wonder why Señor Palma goes to the Cruz *hacienda?*"

"Don Carlos sent him an invitation."

"If those fools try to abduct him—"

"In such a case, you perhaps will make a great fuss and allow him to be abducted."

"I hope they do not try it. I cannot hide everything," Valdez said. "If they were wise, they scattered after this exploit, returning to their homes."

Señor Palma came forth attired for the journey, and Felipe the Frog was at his heels, bristling with weapons. The sergeant went out with them, and when the fresh horses came they got into their saddles.

"Those rogues may attack me," Marcos Palma said. "If they do, there must be no hesitation—slay them instantly!"

CHAPTER XIII

THE SUITOR

THERE was no attack, however, on the short journey to the Cruz *hacienda*. When they arrived there, Don Carlos greeted them with seeming warmth. Having heard what had occurred at the mission, and guessing at the truth of the situation, he saw to it that Valdez and his men had food and drink and a pleasant place for repose, while he entertained Marcos Palma in the patio.

"The rescue of the *fraile* will go hard with those responsible for it," Marcos Palma declared. "I shall make it my immediate business to see the rascals caught and punished. I hope none of your friends is involved, *señor.*"

"I hope not," Don Carlos said. "Let us talk of other things. I fully understand your pursuits, *señor,* and why the Governor has sent you here. But it occurs to me you might make better progress in a different manner."

"What mean you?"

"Men of birth, *señor,* dislike being compelled to do a thing. Approach them in a spirit of friendship, show them how it would be to their interest to take power from the missions—"

"That has been tried, and has failed," Marcos Palma cut in.

"For personal reasons, I would be on terms of friendship with His Excellency," Don Carlos continued. "Perhaps I'd have done as you desire had you come to me in a friendly manner, rather than striking at me through my son."

"Since we understand each other, Don Carlos, and you are with me in this, we may forget that incident now. At least until such time, if it ever comes, when you turn against my desires."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Has it ever occurred to you, *señor,* that your talents might be better expended? The Governor can give you money and honors, perhaps. But Governors do not last long."

Señor Palma smiled. "I have thought of that. It might be a good thing if I established myself in a certain place and formed an estate."

"It is more substantial," Don Carlos agreed.

"Perhaps I should even get married. A man needs a mistress for his house—and your daughter intrigues me, Don Carlos."

"Señor!"

"I have ample funds in store in several places. I stand high in the regard of those who rule the land, not only the present Governor but other politicians. Regardless of how the wind blows, I have a cloak to protect myself from it."

"No doubt," Don Carlos said.

"If the times became turbulent politically, the father of my wife would find himself well protected. Why not do the wise thing, Don Carlos? Give me your daughter for my wife."

"Señor, it cannot be. Let us speak of something else."

"Surely, Don Carlos, you know better than to oppose me."

"You are holding a bludgeon over my head again?"

"Only because the *señorita* has captivated me, and I really desire her for wife."

Don Carlos got up and paced. He knew he had a game to play here. He did some acting, pretending to undergo a mental struggle and trying to reach a decision. In his mind was one thought—delay.

"I am agreeable, *señor,* he said, finally, "under certain conditions."

"And those—?"

"The thing must be done with some delicacy. The betrothal of my daughter to Don Ricardo Rizal has been announced. Let a little time elapse, so it will be thought that she changed her mind regarding Don Ricardo. Be a frequent guest here, so it will appear that you appealed to the *señorita,* more than Don Ricardo."

"That is a good thought," Marcos Palma interrupted.

"Then, later, the betrothal can be announced. Persons will look upon it as a love match. We owe that much to the fair name of my daughter, do we not?"

"I am agreeable," Señor Palma said. "But let us not delay too long."

"We simply have the understanding between us for the time being, *señor.*"

"Agreed! And you may set your mind at rest regarding the other, Don Carlos. Certainly, I would make public no story which would shame the family into which I expect to marry."

"I thank you, *señor.* Let us have more wine."

IT happened that Señorita Dorotea, her *dueña* dozing, had started out into the patio with the intention of finding her father. She came to the patio door in time to overhear.

For a moment she stood as though stunned. Then she retreated swiftly, her eyes wide with horror. Her father must be mad, she thought, to promise her to this man, whatever the cost of refusal might be.

She heard a horse galloping up then, and glanced through a window to see Don Valentino dismount and hand the reins to a servant. She rushed to meet her brother when he entered the house and drew him into a private room. There she sobbed out her story. He, too, seemed stunned.

"It cannot be, Dorotea," Don Valentino said. "Rather than have it happen, I'll slay the man."

"You must not! Our father's lands would be taken from him, and the soldiers would hunt you down. If I only could get away."

"There is no place to go."

"From whence did you just come?"

"From the place to which we took Fray José for safety. We have a camp in the canyon beyond the twin buttes. Only a few of us will be there at a time, for we must show ourselves around our homes to slay suspicion."

"You must use care, Valentino. Show

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yourself now in the patio, acting as though you have been asleep. Let this man think you have been home all the time. Is Don Ricardo at the camp?"

"He is our leader," Don Valentino said. "And when we are alone together he talks of nothing but you."

"And do you think I would marry this foul Marcos Palma, or any other man, while Don Ricardo lives and wants me? I am afraid, Valentino. Our father is frightened, and this man may urge a speedy marriage. I must get away!"

"There is no place—"

"There is, Valentino! To the camp of the *caballeros*."

"Are you mad? An unprotected girl—"

"Fray José is there. And Ricardo. And a *fraile* may perform a marriage ceremony forthwith under circumstances of emergency. I have heard that."

"You must not think of it!"

"Once we were wed, Ricardo would protect me with his life."

He shook his head. "It is unthinkable. There will be some way out. Now, I'll go to the patio."

"What will the *caballeros* do next?" she asked.

"We have many plans to confound this Marcos Palma. We must keep him occupied and wreck his schemes until it is heard whether the Governor is deposed and this man's pass worthless."

"If you were to steal him away?"

"We cannot. We would have to disclose our identities, and he might cause our fathers trouble."

They heard Señor Palma laughing in the patio, and the *señorita* shuddered.

"I must go," Valentino said. "I must pretend I have been asleep, have been home all the time."

SEÑORITA DOROTEA did not appear at the evening meal, nor did her *dueña*. Don Carlos made their excuses, saying the excitement had wrecked the *señorita's* nerves, and through her the nerves of the *dueña*, so they were not fit company for gentlemen.

Don Valentino ate with his father and Marcos Palma, but kept his eyes on his food and said nothing unless directly addressed, and after the meal he made excuse and fled out to where Sergeant Valdez and the troopers were eating and drinking.

"You look tired and pale, young *señor*," Valdez told him, when he got him aside. "Perhaps you have been riding far?"

"I—I am not feeling well," Don Valentino replied, which was the truth at the moment.

"You heard what occurred concerning Fray José, no doubt. I must catch those rogues." Don Valentino saw Valdez' eyes twinkling. "I dislike searching without result. Tell me, Don Valentino, where would you suggest I did not waste time in searching."

Don Valentino looked straight at him, and Valdez smiled.

"I—I would not waste time, were I you, in the neighborhood of the canyon behind the twin buttes," Don Valentino said.

"I thank you for your advice, Don Valentino. You may be sure I'll waste no time searching among those confounded rocks."

A servant came running with word that Señor Palma desired to return to San Juan Capistrano, and Valdez winked brazenly at Don Valentino and shouted for his men to get their horses.

"I hope this band of wild riders does not embarrass me, Don Valentino, by being in any neighborhood when I am there," the sergeant said. "I have a friendly feeling for them, as long as they do not embarrass me."

"I understand, Sergeant Valdez. I fancy you need have no fear of embarrassment."

Valdez chuckled and got into his saddle, and with his men loped around to the front of the house, where Felipe the Frog sat his mule and Marcos Palma was making his farewells. A moment later, the cavalcade was on its way to the town.

"Did you learn anything at the *hacienda*, Sergeant?" Marcos Palma asked.

"Only that the peons and natives there are nitwits. They know nothing."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"What do you intend doing about this matter?"

"Use my brains, instead of running the legs off horses," the sergeant replied. "Fray José is somewhere, and at some time must appear. Those who rescued him—well, *señor,* any man is liable to let a word slip. When I get an inkling—ha!"

"Do your duty well in this, and you will hear favorably from His Excellency," Marcos Palma promised.

THE sergeant chuckled many times on the way to San Juan Capistrano, particularly at the way in which Señor Palma searched the dark spots they passed, and at his nervous manner, for he acted like a man who expected a wild horse to spring out at him. He fumbled with the hilt of his blade, and at the dagger and firearm in his girdle, and jerked nervously at every quick move of his horse.

But there occurred no unusual incident on the way to town, and once there Marcos Palma made himself comfortable in the main room of the inn, at the gaming table, and the sergeant and his men went to the barracks.

Felipe the Frog slipped quietly through the shadows toward the sea and built his fire among the rocks, and soon natives came creeping toward it, for he had made men spread word there would be something interesting for them to hear.

Don Ricardo Rizal came toward the town again, and once more dressed in rags and tethered his horse and crept close to the fire. And when he saw the natives gather, and Felipe the Frog began his croaking, he hurried away silently, got into his proper clothes and rode carefully a short distance to where a dozen of the *caballeros* awaited him. . . .

"Be men!" Felipe the Frog was telling his dupes a few minutes later, warming to his oratory. "Refuse to labor on the morrow unless you first are given goods from the warehouse. For those who wish to fight, there will be weapons later. Show you are worthy of being trusted."

In the shadows, some man gave a sudden squeal of fright, and others sprang to their feet with cries of alarm. Felipe the Frog almost choked. He saw a ring of horsemen surrounding him and the natives, riders who kept at a distance, yet were near enough for him to see they were masked.

Now the horses came nearer at a walk, closing in on every side. The natives screeched and scurried, and the riders did not try to prevent their escape. Felipe the Frog braced himself against a huge rock, gripping his knife.

The horses came nearer. Felipe glanced around swiftly, but they were on every side of him. And suddenly, when one of the riders flung up his hand, they stopped their advance.

"Your trouble-making here is done, rogue!" a harsh voice barked at him. "Your many offenses are known to us. Hold your hands high above your head."

"Mercy, *señores!*" Felipe squawked. "I but did as I was ordered to do."

As he held his arms above his head, a rope sang through the air, and the noose dropped around him and was jerked taut. Felipe the Frog croaked in terror, for he did not like a noose. He clawed at the rope, but it was kept taut, and he could not rid himself of it. Before he could think of anything else, certain of the masked riders dismounted and seized him.

They jerked him along the ground, tore the shirt from his back and lashed him to a tree. Then the whip descended.

Felipe the Frog had been flogged once before, when he had been a pirate, and the sting of the whip sickened him. He felt the lash cut through his skin and into the flesh, and howled in pain and rage. His howls were drowned in laughter.

At last they untied him. They bade him hasten to the inn and inform Marcos Palma of what had occurred, and sprang into their saddles and disappeared at a gallop. Felipe the Frog stumbled toward the town, sobbing his rage, carrying his shirt, the blood streaming from the wounds in his back.

He went straight into the inn, and men sprang to their feet, surrounding him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The masked riders—a score of them!" he cried. "They seized me as I was taking a walk in the moonlight. They tied me to a tree and beat me, saying it was because Marcos Palma is my master."

"Be silent, rogue!" Marcos Palma thundered. "Go attend to your wounds. This is a personal affront to me, *señores*. It is time something drastic be done. Bardoso! Send a servant to the barracks for the sergeant."

FELIPE THE FROG hurried away to bathe his raw back. Marcos Palma, his face a thundercloud, got up from the gaming table and paced around the room. Bardoso's one eye gleamed as he went out into the patio and to the well, where Felipe was performing his painful ablutions.

"So you have been flogged, pirate?" Bardoso asked. "Your tough hide has been burned, eh? It was only a small part of your just desserts, species of a tumblebug."

"Señor Palma will see them hanged!"

"Did it ever occur to you, *señor,* that these mysterious riders may get hold of your precious Señor Palma when the soldiery is not at hand, and give him a backburning also, or worse? Since once we were both of the Brotherhood of the Sea, I give you some advice."

"What is it?" Felipe asked, wincing as the cold water drenched his back.

"Get on your mule and depart, and travel with the utmost speed. By so doing, you may save yourself from pain and death."

"Señor Palma would have me run down if I deserted him. I remain here. When the soldiers find these men, I'll watch them kick and squirm."

"It is denied no man to hope," Bardoso told him. "You were taking a walk in the moonlight, were you? Preaching to natives that they should ape the *caballeros,* no doubt. That man of mine will be refusing to carry out the slops again, and then I shall have a conference with you, flea between a goat's horns!"

Bardoso went back into the inn. Sergeant Valdez had arrived with two of his men, and had heard of the outrage.

"They were here, and now they are gone," the sergeant said. "What would it avail me, Señor Palma, to get my troopers into saddles and chase shadows beneath the moon? It were better I remain here to protect you. This may be but a trick to decoy me and my men away, so they can capture you."

"Use your own judgment, Sergeant," Señor Palma said. He decided on second thought that he would feel more comfortable if troopers were near at hand. "I require a messenger of you."

"A messenger, *señor?*" Valdez asked.

"A trusted man, mounted well, to carry an epistle for me. I'll prepare the message immediately. Do you refuse?"

"Certainly not, *señor,*" Valdez replied. "You have the right to request a messenger of me. He will be ready by the time you have written your message. Where is he to go?"

"To Mission Santa Barbara."

"To—to Santa Barbara? That distance? You mean you wish the message relayed?"

"I desire a good man to take it through as quickly as possible. He can rest himself and his mount after he gets there, and return with the others."

"What others, *señor?*"

"I am sending to the *comandante* at Santa Barbara for more troopers," Señor Palma said. "I do not think you can handle the situation here, Sergeant Valdez. I am asking for an officer to come along, and take charge."

"I am delighted, *señor,*" Valdez said. "There is no ill feeling on my part. It pleases me to hand over authority to another in this affair, as soon as any superior of mine arrives. I'll get your courier ready, *señor.*"

CHAPTER XIV

THE VULTURE STRIKES

FOR four days, there was no further demonstration by the masked riders. Fray José had not been located. Don

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ricardo Rizal remained a fugitive. Sergeant Valdez and his troopers rode forth and rode back, the sergeant declaring he was following certain clues, but nothing came of it.

Cabelleros whom Marcos Palma suspected of being members of the masked band which had rescued Fray José from the whipping post and had whipped Felipe the Frog, appeared at the mission and the inn, and he dared not accuse them openly without evidence.

In this state of affairs, Señor Palma appeared at a disadvantage, as he knew, and was losing what little prestige he had with certain persons. Felipe the Frog kept at work, but he held no more open night meetings. Something had to be done immediately if Marcos Palma was to save his face.

On a certain afternoon, he called Felipe to him, and they walked near the inn and conversed where there was no chance of their words being overheard.

"They are laughing at me behind my back," Señor Palma said. "We must strike a blow."

"Whatever you order, *señor.*"

"You have been at work among the peons and have some of then ready to act?"

"*Si, señor.* They are eager."

"The time has come. There must be an upheaval here, for we are making no progress, and His Excellency will be displeased when he learns of it. Fray José must be located and punished. We must do something to bring him out of hiding."

"That is a good idea, *señor.*"

"And Don Ricardo Rizal—we must bring him out of hiding also. No doubt he spends half his time at his father's place. I am not being fooled by this sergeant. He is in sympathy with our enemies, and is not making a real search. Days have passed, and nothing has been done. We start at once doing things."

"*Si señor!*"

"I have two plans—one to bring Fray José from hiding and the other to fetch Don Ricardo into the open. We'll carry them out without awaiting the troopers from Santa Barbara. Attend me closely!"

They talked and planned, and returned to the inn. Señor Palma called on the sergeant for an escort, and rode again to the Cruz *hacienda.* Don Carlos greeted him with courtesy, but was not cordial. They sat in the patio, and both Don Valentino and Dorotea listened shamelessly to their talk through open windows.

"Regarding my marriage to your daughter, Don Carlos, the time has come to do something about it," Señor Palma said. "I have no desire to delay it longer."

"As we have said before, *señor*—"

"Let the betrothal be announced at once," Señor Palma cut in. "In the absence of that rogue, Fray José, some other *fraile* may officiate. Let the announcement be made here in a few days. You can give a *fiesta.*"

"I'll consider it, *señor.*"

"There is nothing to be considered, Don Carlos. It must be as I say. If I am to become affiliated with your family, its honor is a concern of mine, otherwise, I may relate a story—"

"Perhaps it as well you relate it, *señor.* We can bear the disgrace."

"And see your son hanged as a common murderer?"

"It is your word against his, *señor,* and he is a Cruz."

"And I have influence," Marcos Palma said, smiling evilly. "Also, can you bear to have your lands and goods confiscated, and be sent away from your home with the members of your family, outcasts in poverty?"

"We have friends who would give us shelter."

"If they were informed that their lands would be confiscated also if they harbored you? Perhaps you think it is a hard bargain I drive, Don Carlos, but it is necessary. I shall ride out again in two or three days, and we can arrange details. Until then, I shall be busy in the town."

Marcos Palma rode away, leaving a worried Don Carlos behind him, and a sobbing *señorita* and a worried Don Valen-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tino. It was sunset when he reached the inn, and he ate in his room and held a whispered conference with Felipe the Frog, who slipped out and made contact with certain men.

THE following morning, Señor Palma sent for the sergeant.

"Since you seem to be unable to do anything about capturing Fray José and Don Ricardo Rizal, or running down those rogues who wear masks, I have been active myself," Marcos Palma said. "I have been using certain native spies, and they have brought me reports."

"Sí señor?" Valdez questioned.

"They think Fray José is living in the hut of a sheepherder some miles west of the Rizal rancho, and that Don Ricardo visits him there, and that supplies are sent from the Rizal rancho. You will take your men, perhaps leaving one for guard at the barracks, and ride out there, Sergeant, and do your duty."

"As you say, *señor,*" Valdez replied.

He grinned as he was hurrying back to the barracks, for he knew the information was false. But he would take his men and ride, and pretend to be serving this Señor Vulture, since it would do no harm.

From the window of the inn, Señor Palma watched them ride away, then gestured to Felipe the Frog, who left the inn and went quickly toward the natives' huts. A short time thereafter, Señor Palma mounted his horse and rode slowly to the barracks, where a lone trooper, left behind as guard, was sitting on a bench in the sun.

"It is my desire to inspect the armory room," Marcos Palma said.

The trooper, not unmindful of the fact that it might profit him to cater to the Governor's agent, bowed and unlocked the room and stepped inside with Señor Palma.

Firearms were scarce there, and ammunition also. But there were racks of blades of all sizes. Señor Palma pretended to be inspecting them, and the trooper stood with his back to the door and watched him.

Outside, men began drifting toward the barracks, peons and natives, Felipe the Frog directing them. And suddenly they were inside and at the door of the armory room, and rushed in to seize the trooper before he could make a move in defense.

"Do not harm him," Marcos Palma directed. "Tie him up and leave him so. Then he can say he was overpowered and could do nothing, and so escape censure."

He grinned at the man, who seemed to understand, and after he had been tied Señor Palma thrust a few gold pieces into his pockets. The peons Felipe the Frog had brought to the barracks armed themselves swiftly.

"It is against the law for such as you to carry weapons," Marcos Palma told them. "You know that. But as representative of the Governor I give you permission and call on you to obey my orders. All that has been promised you, you'll receive. Let us go."

Señor Palma went out and mounted his horse, and Felipe his mule, and they led some two score men toward the mission, the peons laughing and shouting and brandishing their weapons like men gone mad.

They charged through the arch and into the patio, scattering the neophytes and driving them out, brushing aside the protesting *frailes.*

"I take charge here, in the name of His Excellency, save for the chapel," Marcos Palma informed them. "I make my headquarters in the guest house. The mission has been abandoned by the *fraile* in charge—"

"I am in charge in the absence of Fray José, *señor,*" one spoke up. "I protest—"

"Silence him!" Palma barked.

No peon would touch the robed Franciscan, but Felipe the Frog threatened him, and the *fraile* stepped back.

Señor Palma went to the guest house with his boisterous crew. They broke out supplies and got food cooking, and opened a cask of rare old wine. Señor Palma knew how to handle such men.

In the sedate guest house, they made merry, shouting and laughing, clashing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their weapons. They trooped to the warehouse and broke into it, and helped themselves. The news spread, and recruits came. The patio arch was closed, and men stationed along the walls.

The *frailes* and faithful neophytes retired to the chapel, listened to the hideous din which desecrated the place, wondered what the end of this would be. The din did not decrease during the siesta hour. Peons and natives were loud and quarrelsome with wine, and in a fighting mood.

AT sunset, Sergeant Valdez and his men returned, tired from their journey, to find the armory looted and Marcos Palma and his motley, drunken crew in charge of the mission. In a rage, the sergeant rode up to the closed arch and demanded admittance. He was let in promptly.

"Señor Palma, I must protest—" he began.

"It was an emergency," Señor Palma interrupted. "No blame will attach itself to you, Sergeant."

"You have armed peons and natives and given them wine. They will get out of hand."

"I can control them. They obey the orders of the man who gives them loot and treats them as human beings."

"You intend to remain in charge of the mission?"

"I do, *señor*. Too long has the guest house been a place of decorum. I intend to make it a place of revelry. Perhaps news of it will spread abroad, and Fray José hear and return in person to protest."

"So that is your plan!"

"A part of it, Sergeant. You need concern yourself with me no longer. Go about your regular duties. Soon the troops will be coming from Santa Barbara."

Sergeant Valdez left and went to the inn. Bardoso grinned when he saw the expression in the sergeant's face.

"So this Marcos Palma has outwitted you," Bardoso said. "It was a pirate's trick he used."

"What can I do?" Valdez asked. "He is the Governor's man."

"They will loot the warehouse, turn the guest house into a tavern, desecrate the chapel before they are done."

"It is a trick to bring Fray José out of hiding, and I fear it may succeed," Valdez said.

"Would it not be possible for you to decide in your own mind that this man exceeds his authority, and take your troopers and drive him and his rogues from the place?" Bardoso asked.

Worriedly, Valdez nodded. "It may be," he said.

"I'll think of that during the night."

Throughout the night, there was wild revelry in the guest house. More peons joined the force, and natives who had not accepted the teachings of the *frailes*. Loot was carried from the warehouse until the adobe huts were filled with it.

But by dawn the din had died down, for many were in drunken slumber or gorged with food. Then it was that Sergeant Valdez and four troopers rode toward the mission gate, the sergeant determined that Marcos Palma should make the peons surrender their arms, and take them out of the place.

Jeers greeted the troopers as they neared the gate, and peons mocked them from the top of the wall. But, before Valdez could shout a demand for Marcos Palma to come to him, there was a din of another sort in the patio, and the sound of fighting, shrieks and cries.

CHAPTER XV

RING OF BATTLE

THE Franciscans had accepted the situation with characteristic humility, but not the native neophytes. The latter watched the storehouse being looted of wares their loving toil had given into the keeping of the *frailes*. They saw peons desecrating the place they had been taught was a haven of rest and peace. And their quiet rage increased until some of the boldest began talking to the others and making plans.

At dawn, when many of Marcos Palma's

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

men were in drunken slumber, the neophytes crept from the chapel and other places where they had been hiding. For weapons, they had bludgeons and a few knives. The *frailes,* praying in the chapel, knew nothing of it until the attack brought a chorus of shrieks.

Their religious zeal turning to courage, the neophytes charged bravely, trying to drive the peons toward the gate. They shouted ancient war cries as they struck. Their first wild rush scattered the enemy, but the peons were well armed and charged back with fury.

Marcos Palma and Felipe the Frog, sleeping in the guest house, rushed out to take charge. Blood drenched the steps of the guest house. Faithful neophytes died there, taking some of the enemy with them.

At the gate, Sergeant Valdez, unable to get in, was howling a demand to know what was happening. He could tell from the sounds that men were fighting and dying. He heard Felipe the Frog bellowing at the peons, heard the high-pitched voice of Marcos Palma giving orders. Outside the walls, women and children gathered, frightened and weeping.

The sergeant decided to scale the wall then. But as Valdez and his men brought a ladder, the patio gate was hurled open. Neophytes rushed out, many of them bleeding from wounds, to scatter among the huts or run down the highway until they dropped exhausted. Infuriated peons rushed after them, brandishing their blood-stained weapons.

Señor Palma and Felipe the Frog were shouting at them to return for more drink and loot. Valdez and his troopers watched them returning. Striding through the gate with his men behind him, Valdez then confronted Marcos Palma.

"*Señor,* I must protest—" the sergeant began.

"We were attacked, Sergeant, and defended ourselves," Marcos Palma interrupted.

"You go too far, *señor.*"

"Do you dare criticize me?"

"I say you go too far. You have drenched the place with blood. You have allowed these rogues to loot the warehouse, and have given them too much wine."

"I tire of your criticism, Sergeant."

"Perhaps His Excellency would not approve of this."

"Perhaps I know better than you, Sergeant, of what His Excellency would approve."

"I offer the suggestion that you remove these men from the mission and allow the *frailes*—"

"When I desire your suggestions, *señor,* I'll ask for them," Marcos Palma said. "Allow me to suggest in turn—that you retire to your barracks and continue playing that you are searching for the escaped prisoners and those masked rogues. The few men at your command cannot stand against the number I have here."

Sergeant Valdez knew that. He and his trained men could take a fearful toll, if there was a clash, but undoubtedly in the end would be slain. It was a time for caution.

"May I know your intentions, *señor?*" Valdez asked.

"I am making my quarters in the guest house of the mission, having tired of the inn. I have recruited loyal men to obey my commands, not being satisfied either with the strength or loyalty of the soldiery stationed here. Be glad, Señor Sergeant, that I do not decide to arrest you and your men—"

"Señor!" Valdez roared. "Are you mad? A pass from His Excellency does not cover everything. You take too much power."

"I take power enough to be in charge here. Is that clear?" Marcos Palma asked. "Retire with your men. We desire to toss out the dead and close the gate."

VALDEZ took his men away, down to the inn. Watching, they saw bodies tossed out and the gate closed. They heard women and children wailing as they mourned their dead.

"Something must be done, my friend," Bardoso said.

"What have you to suggest?" Valdez

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

asked. "Am I to recruit a force from somewhere and attack this emissary of the Governor?"

"Why not play the waiting game, *amigo?* See what this pretty fellow does next. Wait till this wild burst of madness burns itself out."

"At times, Bardoso, you give evidence of having brains," Valdez told him.

So they watched and waited, while news of what had happened ran over the hills like flames before a raging wind. Those *caballeros* of the band who were not in the canyon, but at their homes for sake of alibi, heard it and planned to get to the canyon as speedily as possible, to see what Don Ricardo Rizal would have to suggest concerning the situation.

In the camp, Fray José heard the news from a neophyte who had hurried there with it.

"I must return," he said.

"You cannot," Don Ricardo told him. "This fiend may have you cruelly whipped."

"I must. Can't you understand? He is undoing all the work we have done. My neophytes are being slaughtered. Discipline is being wrecked. They look to me for protection."

"You could not protect them now, Fray José. Wait, and let us plan. Our friends will be gathering. If you return, we go with you, blades out and ready."

"There has been too much fighting and dying already."

"You cannot deal with this man and his dupes alone. He has not the usual feelings of decency. Wait until our friends arrive, at least until we have more news. The story may be exaggerated."

Fray José went to a secluded spot to pray, and Don Ricardo walked back and forth among the rocks, eager for a fresh report. Only four *caballeros* were in the camp. But all would be coming now, Don Ricardo felt sure.

Up in the rocks, one of the men was on constant watch. And now he signaled that somebody was coming, and Don Ricardo sprang up beside him.

Two riders were making for the rendezvous. As they came along the floor of the canyon, Don Ricardo recognized one.

"It is Don Valentino," he said.

"And the other?" the guard asked.

"I cannot tell at the distance. But I know the mount. It is a pony from Don Carlos' stable."

The riders came nearer, for a time were hidden from view, then emerged where they could be seen plainly. Don Ricardo gave a cry of surprise and sprang to his feet to jump down from the rocks. The second rider was *Señorita* Dorotea Cruz, in boy's attire, no doubt her twin brother's.

"The world is mad!" Don Ricardo growled, and shouted for Fray José to come.

Fray José hurried forward, and the other *caballeros* also. The riders came galloping into the tiny clearing and slipped from their saddles, the *señorita's* face a thing of flame. Don Ricardo swept up a cloak from the ground and wrapped it around her.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked Don Valentino, sternly. "Are you mad, to bring your sister to such a place in boy's clothes, and without her *dueña?*"

"Are you not glad to see me, Ricardo?" she asked.

"But this means disgrace."

"Would it be a less disgrace to remain at home and be married to that foul Marcos Palma?"

"What?" Don Ricardo cried.

"It is so, Ricardo," Valentino said. "Our father has gone mad. We heard him talking to that fiend. He was agreeing that the betrothal should be announced. So Dorotea made me bring her here. Would you see her the bride of Señor Vulture?"

"There must be some mistake. Don Carlos would slay her with his own hand before—"

"But I overheard them talking twice, Ricardo," Dorotea said. "In some strange way, Señor Palma has our father in his power."

"What's to be done?" Don Ricardo cried. "Tell us, Fray José."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It is unseemly for a maid to be alone with men," Fray José replied. "It is a thing to call forth criticism and perhaps stain the maid's name forever. But the *señorita* came here with her brother. And no man can say it is wrong for a wife to be with her husband."

"What mean you?" Don Ricardo asked.

"That is the way out of the difficulty, my son, and a very charming way," Fray José replied. "What is more simple than that I wed you here and now?"

OTHER riders were approaching. One by one the *caballeros* gathered at the canyon, having heard the news and realizing that this would call for swift action. Soon a score was there, and each brought fresh intelligence.

It was at sunset, after a conference had been held and plans made, that Fray José married Don Ricardo Rizal and Señorita Dorotea Cruz in the presence of the *caballeros,* beneath a spreading tree, with the night song of the birds for choir.

And then they all mounted and rode from the canyon, with Don Ricardo and his bride happily leading the way. Slowly, they passed the twin buttes and went down a slope to a trail, and this they followed, a merry cavalcade, to the Cruz *hacienda,* having sent a man ahead to break the news to Don Carlos and allay his fears.

Don Carlos met them at the door. He made them welcome in his stern manner, clasped his daughter to his breast and extended a hand to Don Ricardo.

"I am glad," he said, "regardless of what consequences may come of it, no matter what evil this Señor Vulture can do me. But there was a misunderstanding. I was only delaying the fellow until he could be undone."

There was food and drink, while the *caballeros* went on making their plans. While they were planning one of the troopers came with a message for Don Carlos from Marcos Palma, and Don Carlos' face turned almost purple when he read it.

"The fellow commands me to fetch Dorotea to the mission in the morning, that there may be an immediate marriage," he said.

"A trick to make me come out of hiding," Don Ricardo said, "just as all that affair at the mission was a trick to get Fray José to go in and surrender."

They could trust the trooper who had brought the message, so they sent him back with word for Sergeant Valdez, and after the man had ridden away they rested and feasted like men with no thoughts of violence in their minds.

"There will be another marriage in the chapel," Don Carlos said, "as soon as it can be arranged, and a proper feast afterward. Perhaps we all shall find our wealth confiscated before long, if this rogue really has power—"

"There is a doubt in my mind as to that," Don Ricardo put in.

"What have you planned, my son?"

"To clean the mission of that devil's crew, first. Then, we shall see."

The bride was terrified at thought of her husband riding into danger so soon, but he told her to fear nothing. He led her down the hallway and turned her over to a beaming Señora Anita, and kissed her for the first time in his life and laughed in Señora Anita's face afterward.

"You are no longer a *dueña,*" he told her, "but guard her for me until I return."

CHAPTER XVI

WAR AT THE MISSION

LATE that night, when the moon swam the sky, the *caballeros* mounted and rode slowly toward San Juan Capistrano. The mist was lifting when they arrived. Save for the inn, the town was dark. Sounds of revelry came from the mission, but the feasting was not so lively as it had been the night before.

They stopped in a secluded place, and Don Ricardo rode on with two others, and one went ahead to the barracks and got Valdez, who was up and waiting. They talked of plans and rode on to the inn, for none of Palma's crew was there now.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bardoso had the heavy shutters up at the windows. He let the young men in, and plans were discussed again. Before the dawn came, all was ready.

Loyal men and neophytes had been collected at the barracks and armed after a fashion. Valdez had his handful of troopers. Bardoso got out his old cutlass and sharpened it, his eye agleam as he worked. Don Ricardo and his *caballeros* had their horses behind the stables where they could not be seen from the mission wall.

The dawn came, and Fray José walked down the path among the adobe huts alone as the women came out to get their cooking fires started. They stared at him and crossed themselves, and some knelt as he passed, for they thought he had come alone to face the fury.

A man watching on the wall saw him and shouted, and others took up the cry. The wall was lined with men when Fray José came to a stop in front of the gate.

"Why is this gate closed?" he called. "It is never to be closed except for defense. Do you men fear an attack from one old *fraile?*"

Word had been taken to Marcos Palma, and now he appeared on the wall long enough to identify the *fraile,* then ordered the gate thrown open. He strode through it with Felipe the Frog and some others close behind him.

"So you have returned!" he said.

"I am here, *señor*. I have come to order you from the place you have desecrated."

Marcos Palma smiled. "We have some talking to do, *fraile,*" he said. "You will tell me truthfully the names of those who rescued you from the whipping, that I may have them punished. You will reveal the hiding place of Don Ricardo Rizal. You will pay over to me, for His Excellency, all the store of gold you have in this mission, as indemnity for what has occurred. And then you will be tied to the post, and for your original offense given twenty lusty lashes instead of the five you were to receive."

Fray José did not flinch.

"I call upon you, *señor,*" he said, "to order out of the mission buildings those disorderly persons you have attached to yourself, that I may enter and cleanse the place of the vileness you have spread upon it."

Marcos Palma laughed and gestured to some of his men.

"Seize this robed rogue and take him to the guest house," he ordered.

But the men on the wall suddenly began screeching wildly. From behind the barracks and stables the *caballeros* had ridden. From the former the neophytes and troopers were pouring with Sergeant Valdez at their head.

MARCOS PALMA darted back inside the gate and howled an order, and the gate was closed and barred. Men lined the walls again. Fray José, forgotten for the moment, entered one of the huts to be out of the way.

Without haste, the force descended upon the wall, the *caballeros* with masks covering their faces, the neophytes howling as they followed the troopers. From somewhere Bardoso appeared, swinging his old cutlass.

Sergeant Valdez stopped in front of the gate, and Marcos Palma called down to him:

"What is the meaning of this, Sergeant? Are you in league with His Excellency's enemies? Are you a traitor? Behind you are the masked riders who rescued a man condemned—"

"It is my object, Señor Palma, to clear the rabble out of the mission," the sergeant interrupted. "You command them, so give the order for them to depart at once, leaving behind all the loot they have taken from the storehouse."

"Are you mad?" Marcos Palma cried. "Why should you so interest yourself?"

"Until orders come from His Excellency that mission property is to be seized, it remains the property of the *frailes*. And in that case it would be seized for His Excellency, not to be given to looting scum."

"I represent His Excellency, and my

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

word is law. Disperse those men and arrest the masked riders, or I shall report—"

"They are too many for me to disperse, did I wish to do so."

"Ha! And you do not?"

"I do not, *señor*. If I am making a mistake, I'll endure the consequences of it. Open the gate, and order out those men!"

"They remain," Marcos Palma said. "And you may be interested in knowing, Sergeant, that I have received word by native runner that troopers from Santa Barbara are now approaching. Do as I order, or you find yourself in difficulties."

Before Valdez could reply, one of the men on the wall discharged a firearm, and that was enough for the *caballeros*, already itching to be at work. They shouted and charged, running their horses along the wall, their blades flashing as they tried to get at the men stationed there.

Marcos Palma dropped down out of sight and began bellowing orders for defense. Neophytes came running from behind the huts with ladders, and the *caballeros* sprang out of their saddles and ran to put the ladders against the wall and ascend.

Over the wall they went, shouting their battle cries, and men inside fled before them. They opened the gate and let the others in. Valdez and his troopers swept through the gate with the armed neophytes at their heels.

Bardoso, howling like a maniac, charged with the others, swinging his terrible cutlass. Felipe the Frog bellowed in reply and rushed to meet him, brandishing a heavy blade taken from the armory room of the barracks.

While men fought and cursed and swirled around them, these two stood face to face and parried and hacked.

"Unhung pirate!" Bardoso shouted. "Tell my servant not to carry out slops, will you?"

"Watch your other eye!" Felipe bellowed in answer.

On every side of them, men were screaming their rage and weapons were clashing. But these two saw only each other. Felipe the Frog crowded Bardoso back against the wall, and Bardoso was commencing to find that his wind and strength were not so good as they once had been. He felt Felipe's blade bite into his left shoulder. Rage rumbled from his throat at the sting of the wound, and his eye blazed as he made a terrific counter attack.

Felipe the Frog parried in vain. Bardoso's cutlass cut deeply, and Felipe went down. He tried to rise, sank back, and his mouth sagged open.

"Cheated the rope," Bardoso growled. "Thief to the last!"

Then he turned to look for fresh fighting.

BUT the peons were breaking and scattering. They could not stand before the determined, skilled fighting of the *caballeros* and troopers. Marcos Palma called to them in vain. When they could, they dashed through the gate or got over the wall, tossed away their illegal weapons and ran.

And Marcos Palma finally was standing on the steps of the guest house alone, his red blade held ready for more work, when Sergeant Valdez called an end of the fighting.

"Clean up the place!" the sergeant shouted. "Take away the dead and wounded. Tell the *frailes* it is safe for them to come from the chapel and run their mission again. One of you find Fray José."

Fray José appeared at that moment, to take charge as though he had not been away at all.

"Sergeant Valdez!" Marcos Palma shouted. "What of these masked men? They aided a condemned man to escape."

"With my few men, I am powerless to overcome them, *señor*," the sergeant replied, grinning.

"Whip this Fray José, who escaped the penalty days ago!"

"I have decided to defer the whipping until I have direct from the Governor his order to carry it out, *señor*."

"Troops are approaching. Do you wish me to stamp you traitor when they arrive?

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A fine soldier, you! And these fine, blue-blooded cowards ashamed to show their faces—"

One of the *caballeros* stepped forward. "You may see mine, *señor,*" he said.

Don Ricardo Rizal swept off his mask and tossed it aside.

"Ha! Sergeant, seize this man, at least!" Marcos Palma shouted. "He is fugitive from a charge of treason. And these others—"

The others were emulating Don Ricardo's move. Masks were being tossed to the ground. Marcos Palma saw Don Valentino Cruz, and others he knew.

"You?" Señor Palma cried, at sight of Don Valentino. "So you lift hand against me, after I have protected you and your family? Sergeant, arrest this Don Valentino Cruz for—"

"One moment, *señor!*" Don Ricardo cried, springing forward, his eyes blazing. "You cannot avoid me longer by making talk about everything and everybody. On guard!"

"I have told you my obligation—"

"Liar and coward!" Don Ricardo cried. "You are standing there with a red blade in your hand. You were quick enough to use it on clumsy peons. Use it now on me!"

"At another time, *señor—*"

"You are a common gambler and cheat, a cowardly rogue, a murderer! You stabbed to death Manuel Gonzales, in your own room at the inn—"

"The man who stabbed him was—"

"Was you, *señor!*" Don Ricardo shouted in interruption. "No other name enters into it! On guard!"

"You dare duel with me, with the troopers coming down the highway? If you slay me, they will make short end of you."

"Not all of us are cowards," Don Ricardo said. "Your offenses against me are many. You have annoyed a family with which I have just become connected by marriage—"

"Marriage?" *Señor* Palma cried.

"I was married last evening to a *señorita* to whom you, in a moment of arrogance, dared lift your eyes. Though I lower myself to do it, I am calling you to account."

Don Ricardo stepped forward swiftly, and again his hand cracked against Marcos Palma's cheek.

"Is that sufficient, *señor?*" Don Ricardo asked. "Or must I say again that I question the purity of your parentage?"

SOME men scoffed, and Marcos Palma gave a roar of rage and used blade in a foul attack. Don Ricardo evaded it, and steel rang.

Coward he may have been, but Marcos Palma was handy with a blade when fight finally was forced upon him. Don Ricardo, for all his skill, had no easy time. But he was remembering this man's plots and perfidy, and how good men had died because of his scheming, and his wrist seemed to have added strength, his eye a keener perception of distance, his senses to be in more perfect timing.

Once he retreated, for a shaft of sunlight had struck into his eyes. Marcos Palma pressed the advantage. The point of his blade ripped Don Ricardo's sleeve and scratched his arm enough to bring blood.

But Don Ricardo, with the sun out of his eyes, now became the aggressor. He pressed Marcos Palma along the wall and past the fireplace. He avoided a wild lunge, the last desperate effort of a man who knows he fights a losing battle. Then his blade slipped home.

Marcos Palma dropped his weapon, reeled aside, coughed, and slumped down against the wall. A gush of blood came from his mouth as the watchers howled. His eyes rolled.

"Ricardo—" Don Valentino called, softly.

Don Ricardo understood his plea. He grasped Valentino's arm and went forward, to kneel beside the dying man.

"It is the end for you, Marcos Palma," Don Ricardo said.

"It is *señor.* You are good—with a blade."

"Do not die with a wrong unrighted—"

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ah! I see the young *señor* beside you, and understand. It is well, young *señor*. You did not slay the man. I stabbed him when he caught me cheating. I go to join him now."

Marcos Palma's eyes rolled again, closed, opened and fixed.

"He has paid," Don Ricardo said. "Now, I must go to the chapel and be purged of the blood stain."

As he sheathed his blade, there came a clatter of hoofbeats, and natives began screeching. The crowd scattered. And toward them galloped a score of troopers from Santa Barbara, their weapons ready, and a *capitán* at their head.

CHAPTER XVII

"HANG HIM!"

THE troopers charged and surrounded those of the group. The *capitán* shouted orders and dismounted, beckoning Sergeant Valdez to him.

"You are Valdez?"

"*Sí, capitán.*"

"It appears you cannot do your duty hereabouts. There has been a complaint. Where is His Excellency's emissary, Señor Marcos Palma?"

"There," Valdez replied, pointing.

"Dead?"

"In fair duel."

"Who slew him?"

Don Ricardo stepped forward. "I did, *Señor el Capitán,*" he said.

"Seize him!" the officer barked.

Troopers tore Don Ricardo's blade from his hand and bent his arms behind his back to hold him prisoner. He submitted without resistance.

"A fair duel!" Valdez was saying. "This man is Don Ricardo Rizal—"

"Enough! And the dead man was a trusted emissary of His Excellency! Troopers! Drive me back these curious rogues! You, sergeant, hand over your blade. You are under arrest, and there will be an investigation."

This officer was forceful and direct. His eyes snapped as he barked his orders, and his men sprang to obey. The curious were driven back, and Sergeant Valdez was disarmed.

"Now!" the officer said. "You, Don Ricardo Rizal, you confess to slaying this Marcos Palma?"

"I do, *señor*. All here saw it. This Señor Vulture, as he was called—"

"Enough! Casting slurs will not benefit you. I have my orders. I have no personal interest in this matter beyond carrying out those orders. The dead man was a representative of His Excellency, and that is enough. I am not concerned with his character. You admit slaying him. That is enough for me. You shall hang immediately!"

"*Señor!*" Valdez cried, as a thrill of horror went around among those listening.

"A rope!" the officer barked. "Find a likely place for the execution. No protests! A word from you, Sergeant, and you and your men here will be confined."

"Is it possible that you would hang me forthwith?" Don Ricardo asked.

"Forthwith! I have other things to do."

Fray José touched the officer on the sleeve. "I am Fray José, in charge of the mission here," he said. "Let me explain the merits of this affair."

"I respect you, *fraile*. And I know how all your kind are forgiving and merciful. But I am a soldier, a machine run by others through orders. If you would be with this man during his last few minutes on earth, I grant the privilege."

Others surged toward him, Don Valentino cried at him, the other *caballeros* became threatening. But the officer barked another command, and his troopers formed a big ring with Don Ricardo and Fray José in the center of it alone.

"Careful *señores!*" the officer warned. "There are plenty of ropes. We do not tolerate treason here!"

"If you will but listen—" Valdez began.

"Silence, Sergeant!" the officer howled. "Is not the score against you heavy enough already? Hurry, *fraile!* I cannot allow you to pray for him forever. Where is the rope . . ."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AT Mission Santa Barbara, a day after the troopers had departed, a runner came from the north with messages, and there was immediate excitement.

El Viento did not understand the excitement, nor did he care about it. He had been resting since his run from San Juan Capistrano, an object of hero worship.

But now he was sent for, and a *fraile* he had learned to like looked at him sternly.

"El Viento, you are ready?" he asked.

"I am ready, *padre*."

"Though your legs grow to be as lead and your tongue hang out and eyes grow dim, you must run with greater speed than ever before, to San Juan Capistrano."

"I understand, *padre*."

"You do not understand. The lives of men may depend on your running. This message must get to the hand of Fray José and the officer of soldiery who yesterday departed with his men. You must overtake them. When fatigue would slow you, you must remember what I have said. This, El Viento, must be the greatest run of your life."

"I am ready, *padre!*"

In the history of the missions is recorded how El Viento ran. At times he dropped exhausted for a short sleep. He ate nothing along the way except some dried meat. He gulped water at trailside springs. He used short trails of which he had learned, and dodged many perils.

By day and through the moon-drenched night he ran. The hills flew beneath his mocassins. On the level stretches he increased speed.

He knew something of the crisis of which he was a part. He had heard men talking in Santa Barbara. He knew Fray José might be in peril, and that was enough to give him added strength.

It was the heat of the day when he topped the last hill and saw the buildings of the mission at San Juan Capistrano. It seemed to El Viento there were more black dots than usual around the buildings, more horses. But his sight was so dim from fatigue that he could not be sure.

His lips were swollen and dry. His heart was hammering at his ribs. His legs were as lead, his knees were jerking up mechanically and his elbows seemed grown into his sides. His face was gaunt.

He plodded up the dusty trail past the inn, seeing only the arch of the mission wall and the group near it. Men began howling at him. He realized dimly that there were troopers, and a man with a rope around his neck, and he saw Fray José with the officer standing beside him.

El Viento, a haze before his eyes, held out a packet toward Fray José.

"For you, *padre*," he muttered, and collapsed.

Fray José shouted for help for the runner, cried something at the officer, tore open the packet feverishly.

"One for you, too, *Señor al Capitán*," Fray José said. "It looks like official orders."

The officer growled, motioned for the man having Don Ricardo in charge to wait a moment, tore open the message and read swiftly. His eyes were gleaming when he glanced up, to see Fray José watching him closely.

"That native runner—you owe him considerable, Don Ricardo Rizal," the officer said. "He has saved your life."

"*Señor?*"

"Take off that rope!" the officer barked. "Untie his hands! There is no offense. It was only a fair duel, and there perhaps was aggravation aplenty. When he was slain, it appears, this Marcos Palma was not the Governor's agent, but only a common person. I have here intelligence that the Governor was deposed, and another is in his place. I have also an order for the arrest of this Marcos Palma for treason. But I am spared that. A mere report will be enough, to say the man is dead."

"Ricardo! Ricardo!" Don Valentino was crying, happily, as the troopers took off the rope and bonds.

"Well, well! What a change!" the officer was saying. "I take it, Sergeant, that you are in good standing again. Lead me to the inn, for I am thirsty. Stable my men

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and horses in your pigsty. Quickly—quickly! I never saw such a slowness!"

He linked arms with Valdez and stalked away, and Bardoso waddled ahead to make preparations. Bardoso was already figuring how he could add to Señor Palma's score and get the *capitán* in a friendly mood, so he would allow Bardoso the dead man's horse and effects for payment.

Don Ricardo, recovered now from the shock of sudden danger and equally sudden reprieve, stood between Don Valentino and Fray José, with the other *caballeros* crowding toward him.

"I must go to the chapel and purge myself of the blood stain," Don Ricardo said once again. "But race you home, Valentino, and tell señora Dorotea that I'll be there soon, and send word to my father also."

He smiled then at the thought of the *señora* awaiting his return, and turned to pass beneath the arch with Fray José, on the way to the chapel.

THE END

Never Say Die

SOMETIME catch a fly. Drown it, holding it under water with a pair of tweezers. Then catch another fly, and drown it. Cover one of the drowned pests with table salt, and you will soon perceive that you have performed a miracle—you have brought the dead back to life. The salt on the saturated body of the fly ionizes it, setting up minute electrical currents. Presently the fly, resurrected, will stumble blindly out of the salt, shake his wings and merrily buzz away. His fellow corpse, who did not receive the salt, will be as dead as anything you ever hit with a fly swatter.

If you have experimented with a fly you can better sympathize with the Russian experimenter, Dr. I. P. Petrov whose motto might well be, "Never say die!"

Petrov's first method in bringing the dead to life was to jolt the sciatic nerve; this restored breathing to animals that had been killed by strangulation. A smart tap on the sciatic nerve (back of the hip) also proved the key to life for animals that had been chloroformed—some of them for as long as forty-five minutes.

Encouraged by this success, Petrov has bled, asphyxiated and anesthetized animals. Then, after waiting—often as long as twenty minutes—he has injected adrenalin into the heart, or, when this has failed to give the animal life, has massaged the heart itself.

But Dr. Petrov is not the only scientist who is refusing to say die. Professor W. T. McNiff and Dr. Leonard Piccoli of Fordham University are experimenting in reviving animals who have been electrocuted. They have found that by restoring "ventricular fibrillation" by an electrical *counter* shock, life may often be restored. They say, however, that candidates for the electric chair need not get optimistic. *That* shock, as it destroys the nerve centers, is final, and there is no road back for its recipients. But for the rest of us there is a possibility that some day we may be discussing our latest *death* just as we now discuss our latest operation.

—*Albert George*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

By C. F. KEARNS

Men Without Dogs

THE wind began at dawn. It started at the Pole and, cruising south across the seas of eternal ice, gathered speed and bitter spite with every league of its frigid course. Its hollow murmur swelled to a sullen howl on the fringe of the tundra and its wrath rose in a feral scream as it blasted the gaunt vastness of the sparsely timbered sub-Arctic with woeful presage of destruction.

Blizzard!

No living thing moved, yet there was abundant life in the frozen world. There was life in a fragile teepee pitched in the heart of a ten-acre spruce clump, and high hope in the two harsh men within, who were moderately comfortable with a meager store of possession, crouching across a fire that warmed their snow banked canvas-and-moosehide wickiup to shoulder height. Above, the wind—hampered and checked as it was by the timber—tore smoke and heat abruptly away in fierce, gyrating updrafts.

Handsled Burke lifted the black tea pail from its cooking stick and sucked in a gulping draught before handing it to his partner, Two-horse Swen. Swen grinned through yellow and gray tangled whiskers, holding the can by its wire handle to cool. "Whooping it up good now. Dat wind is yust made to order for us—hey, Burke? We don't leave no tracks."

"Drink before it freezes," Burke bade him roughly, lifting another black pail from the flames. "This meat ought to be done. Forty below, Swen. How about a little walk?"

"Ya," assented Swen placidly. They were both big, alike in width of shoulder and depth of chest; lean hard men clad in moccasins and heavy woolens and grimy canvas parkas, the hoods fringed with wolverine fur. But Burke's violent, brooding eyes behind his reddish mask of combed face-hair, his even unstained teeth, unconsciously patronized the unkempt, thicker-bodied, older man. Nor was Burke young. Yet there was on him a stamp of personal fastidiousness, a certain

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

surety of action, a straight-backed arrogance of word and gesture that outland roads and squandered years had not quite erased.

Swen grinned again. "Dat's right, Burke. We eat. Den we go."

They ate wolfishly, impatiently. Burke finally sat back on his haunches, whittled a sliver with his keen sheath knife and, sucking at it, reminisced.

"End of the trail, Swen. And not too soon. We're not getting any younger. I told you if you followed me, you'd wear either handcuffs or diamonds. Well, we've dodged the handcuffs—so far. I figure we've got fourteen thousand dollars worth of fur and that's enough for us to live like white men again. To live like—ah—just to live."

"Ya," assented Swen cheerfully. "I guess we both get good and drunk when we hit a town. Ya, sure, Burke."

"Hi!" Burke reproved sharply. "You don't get drunk at the first town or the second one either. You open that wide mouth of yours anywhere in this country and you'll have a flock of mounties on your neck. You'll get a chance to celebrate in Vancouver or Seattle. Well, what are we waiting for?"

SWEN drew the parka hood over his head, lifted the hide door-flap, and the interior was instantly filled with whirling snow. He lifted in a light, narrow ski-runnered sled some ten feet long. "Kick out dat fire, Burke. We need room."

They worked rapidly, standing on a thick floor carpet of evergreen boughs. The main load was a six-foot canvas - wrapped bundle, roughly squared, two feet wide by a little less in height. Two rolled sleeping bags; two filled jute sacks, one containing food and the other the two cooking pails, a frying pan, rags of clothing and a miscellany of small articles. A double-bitted ax and a short rifle were wedged between the lashings. Burke straightened, donning wool mitts and wolfskin pull-overs, beating his palms together.

"Not much of an outfit but it's all we need from now on. We're through with this blasted cold country. We're headed out and and we're staying out. It's wonderful what a man can do in civilization if he has a few dollars. How'd you like to sleep between white sheets again, Swen? Have a bath whenever you feel like it? Meet decent people that speak your own language?"

"Ya, sure, Burke. We'll have a good drunk when we hit the city. Maybe have bath first. Ho, dat's a good yoke, hey, Burke?" He shook out the rigid draw rope. "How will you pull—wheeler or leader?"

Burke moved a small compass on his palm. "South by west it is, but anywhere south will do. Anywhere." He pinned the compass by its clasp on the left sleeve of his parka. "I'll break trail. My webs are in better shape than yours."

Mid-morning. The storm's threnody shrilled eerily in the timber but its force was an evil thing when they left the shelter of their spruce clump. They knew, leaning against the draw rope, a vast thankfulness that the wind was at their backs.

They plodded a steady, dogged course. The narrow sled followed the snowshoe furrow but the dry snow was too thin to pack and the ski runners ploughed deeply. It had a granular consistency, the instability of dry sand and nearly as resistant.

Down wind they had limited visibility, sufficient to avoid the timber and seek level going. They followed the shallow valley unhurriedly, but without

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stops. Constant motion was the most effective protection against the gripping cold. Early dusk was lowering when Burke dropped to his knees and thrust a warning hand behind him. Swen, hunching close with his face on his partner's shoulder, saw a cabin less than fifty yards in front, barely discernible through the smother of driven snow.

"Too close, Burke. We back up and go around."

"Stay put," advised Burke calmly. "If those dogs haven't winded us by this time they never will. We've been coming down wind to them all the time. I don't believe the owner's home. He wouldn't have the dogs inside if he was there. We're safe."

"Good. We might yust as well go in and boil up, heh?"

"No. Why advertise? We'll sheer off and keep going."

THEY had risen to take the strain again when Burke slowly sank back to his knees. Swen, glimpsing the cause of Burke's move, did likewise.

They watched a blurred figure fighting the storm for the few yards from the cabin to the open fronted woodshed. They watched anxiously until the figure struggled back to the cabin. Swen spoke heavily in Burke's ear. "What do you make of dat? You are one smart faller. Tell me. Hey?"

"Beats me." Burke was puzzled. "That's a little fellow. I thought this lad was a big man, judging by his tracks. Never saw us. Come on, before he comes out again."

"Ya, sure, Burke." His tone held a wealth of regret. "But you wait now. I got good eyes. Dat ain't no man. Dat's a woman. She can't cut dose big blocks so she has to pack dem in and burn dem in d' heater. I guess dat faller is away and he won't be back for awhile. Hey, Burke, I guess we got to advertise after all. We got to cut dat woman some small wood."

Burke yelled an oath. "No!"

Swen gripped him by the shoulders and his mittened grip held tightly through the stiff folds of the parka and woolens beneath. "Ya!" Their eyes clashed furiously, their hairy faces only inches apart. Burke twisted free, stepped back, raised both hands high in eloquent pantomime, then slowly let them drop.

"Look, Swen," he pleaded. "Don't be dumb. That woman is all right. She has plenty of wood. That shed is filled with it. It doesn't need to be split. Let her burn it in the heater. This blow won't last forever and nobody knows we are here or which we we go. Our tracks are covered. Why spoil it all now? We've gone through enough hell for what we have and now we are going out with a stake to pay for it. Don't be so—so childish."

"Ya, sure." Swen's voice drooped dejectedly. "I know you are thinking about a bath and some clean clothes. Yust de same, Burke, you pick up dat rope and head for dat house or maybe I get mad. Now—don't make me get mad—hey, Burke?"

"Blast a cantankerous squarehead! You've gone bush batty on me. I—Oh . . .come on."

They shouted, "Hello, this house," and kicked off their snowshoes. The door yielded to a pull on the latch cord, and a shaded coal-oil lamp spilled cozy cheer as they crowded inside. A weary young woman and a haggard, pain-racked man cried out gladly, while a little girl sat round-eyed by the stove. Then the woman's hand fluttered apprehensively to her throat while bewilderment crowded the man's features as he slowly sank back on the bunk.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Good evening," Burke greeted them, his swift eyes missing nothing. "Cold, isn't it?" The simple living room of this isolated family disconcerted—almost frightened him. He saw order, and thrift, and cleanliness. Cleanliness! The man lay between white sheets, with white blankets and a spotless counterpane. The floor was scrubbed. The child's dress was knitted wool, green and white. "Not much fun out today," he concluded lamely.

"Oh!" There was doubt in the woman's welcome, but it was submerged by a need that overrode her distrust of any and all strangers. "My—my husband is terribly ill. There is a doctor at the post and we have been expecting the patrol for the past week but they won't be here now until the weather breaks. I . . . But you are cold and hungry. Do take off your things and I will get you food. My husband is the warden for the game reserve and this is the south boundary. I'm Mrs. Wilson and"—she smiled wanly—"this is Joan. She is four."

"Ho," acknowledged Swen, keeping his voice low. "Dat's one fine little girl you got. I'm a great faller with kids, but I ain't much of a hand to talk. I let my partner do dat. Yust now I go out and cut some small wood and we get a good fire once in the kitchen stove. We figured maybe you was out of split wood."

SWEN went out. Burke shrugged out of his cold-stiff windbreaker and dropped it in a corner. The room was spaciously comfortable. At the rear were two closed doors which he judged led to the kitchen and a bedroom. He plucked a handful of frost ice from his whiskers and stepped over to the couch. The warden, obviously suffering, was watching him intently.

"Ax," he said, answering the silent query. "Gashed my foot beside the big toe, right to the instep. Kid's trick. Four miles out and I froze it getting home. The police had borrowed my dogs so I was stuck. Where are you fellows from?"

"Here and there," said Burke, guardedly. "How far is the post?"

"Twenty miles. But your dogs won't make it in this weather. They'll quit on you."

"Our dogs never quit," Burke told him cryptically, as Swen came in with an armful of wood, dropped it and went quickly out again. Burke grabbed a handful of broken wood and felt for his knife. "I'll start your kitchen fire, Mrs. Wilson." In the warmth of the living room he could notice the reek of his own unwashed body; the rank staleness of sweat and smoke and the stench of wild animals that clung about him, and he was ashamed.

An hour later Swen pushed himself back from the table. "Dat was one fine meal, lady. I'm pretty good cook myself. I cooked for a camp of forty men one winter and I never lost a man. But you got me beat. Now I guess we got to move on. I split up enough small wood to last you for a week anyhow, maybe more. We got to take this sick man to the doctor right away." He leaned forward, his thick fingers bridged tensely on the table edge. "Hey, Burke?"

"Don't get excited." Burke stood up slowly, his action as deliberately indifferent as his speech. "Let's look at that leg. I don't suppose there is anything we could do that you haven't thought of, Mrs. Wilson?"

She shook her head, and in her dubious half-fearful appraisal he knew the misery in her eyes had not been so much the anxiety, the loss of sleep or

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the constant nursing, as the slowly fading hope of getting help for her man. She rolled back the covers of the couch and Swen held the lamp. She plucked lightly at the bandage, and both men sucked in their breaths at what they saw. In silence she replaced the wrappings. Swen's cold gaze was riveted on his partner's face, and Burke clenched his hard fists against his flat stomach, watching the tight-lipped man on the bed.

"Your dogs," the warden's whisper came between his teeth, "will never make it."

"Yeah!" Burke grinned a grim twisted grin. "Listen, brother. Some places we've been they call me Handsled Burke, and my partner here, Two-horse Swen. Maybe you've heard of us. We've been around. They have another name for us, too. They call us the men who have no dogs. So—don't you worry about our dogs. We're our own dogs. We'll haul you to that post and we'll land you there before morning."

"Haul me!" The warden shook his head. "You're crazy, man. It can't be done."

Mrs. Wilson caught Burke's sleeve. "You—you haven't any—a dog team—outside?"

"Wrap him up well," Burke ordered her brusquely. "We'll put our two sleeping bags around him too. It's forty or so below out but we'll keep him warm. Dogs? Don't you worry about our dogs. We've hauled that sled from the Cassiar to Cape Barrow and from Aklavik to Peace River Crossing. We'll take him out."

"Ya, sure," grinned Swen, relieved. "We can haul up to five tons from here to—well—almost any place where dere is snow enough." He spread the unrolled feather robes on the floor, one above the other.

With careful hands they lifted the blanket-wrapped man and laid him on the doubled robes. Burke selected two short pieces of firewood. "These will keep the weight off that bad leg. Those feathers are pretty light but no cold will reach you. Man-sized bags with snap fasteners. You'll be all right."

Swen supported the warden's back as he embraced his misty-eyed wife and the little girl. They bore him outside and placed him on the front end of the ski sled with his shoulders braced against the forward part of the canvas-wrapped bundle. Burke re-entered the house.

"Don't worry. This little side trip wasn't included in our plans but you can believe me that we will take your husband to the post without any delay. We aren't much to look at but we can manage this job without any trouble. Your husband will be in the doctor's hands by daylight."

"It's so far!" She twisted her hands. "And the weather is so terrible. And you've just been out in it." Burke's chill, confident eyes were ringed with the fur of his parka hood, but something of his assurance checked her mounting hysteria, gave her hope. "I—if I could properly thank you both."

Burke fumbled for the door catch. "Don't try. Keep up your courage—you have lots, I know." He remembered to smile at the child. "Goodbye."

AS he bent his strong neck to the blast and picked up the lead rope he heard Swen talking. "Dat faller is plenty tough. He yust says, 'Ouch!' once, and I never seen such a mess of a foot. I guess it takes a tough man to live in this country—hey, Burke?"

There was no trail but the way ran south along the shallow valley and for a mile it was a stiff pull with the gale

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quartering at their rear. Then Burke dropped his rope as they both leaned over the man on the sled.

"Which way now?"

"Across the big muskeg," he told them from the overlapping folds of eiderdown, white with driven snow particles, and stiff with the frost of his breathing. "Keep the timber close on your right hand until you hit the lake. It's eight miles across. Steer south by a point or two east. Keep down wind and you won't be far out. The trail is cut out through the timber over the ridge at the bottom end, and cut out well. A survey traverse, twelve feet wide. Takes you right in."

The lake was a bleak, wind swept gridiron, its bars the drifted snow barriers, low and thick. Swen went to the back of the sled, "Ya, we let the wind shove some."

The wind pushed them across the glare-ice at a run and they lifted the sled across each drift to repeat the down slide. Burke changed places with his team-mate to snatch what respite he could. When finally the ridge rose against them through the gloom, they took counsel.

"Didn't take us long," panted Burke. "Now we have to pull. Pull! And we're tired. I'll look for the trail. Stay here until I come back. I'll follow this drift. Good thing there's a moon somewhere up above or we couldn't see at all."

He was back soon. They dragged their freight an eighth of a mile athwart the full fury of the blizzard, straining to the utmost every inch of the way. The turn up the narrow aisle into the timber was relief, with the wind again behind them. But the grade was a stiff one tugging unbearably against their worn-out muscles.

Burke stopped, leaning against the pull rope to stay on his feet. Each snowshoe anchored him with the weight of the snow that oozed up through the webs—snow that he had to lift at every struggling step. Swen lurched against him, sobbing hoarsely:

"Dey say dat a man ain't all in until he is so tired that he can't make one more step. Ya, sure. Dat's me, Burke."

Burke couldn't answer.

"Ya," wheezed Swen in his ear. "I'm yust so tired that we got to keep moving or we stay right here permanent. Must, you, Burke. Keep moving."

THEY tensed to the drag of the ski sled while cold sweat ran down their faces and froze to icicles on their whiskers. At the crest of the rise Burke fell on his face and didn't try to get up. Swen set him on his feet and clouted him on the head and shoulders with a mighty mittened hand.

"You ain't reading about dis in a book, Burke. You don't worry about dem diamonds or handcuffs. You yust pull some more, Burke, udderwise I don't get dat drunk and you don't get dat bath. Pull, blast you. *Pull!* You can rest going down hill."

The road ran through the timber, slightly downgrade for the most part, and it ran straight. Yet for the wind at their backs, pushing them on, they would have fallen in the traces. For both men it was a nightmare of dragging progress; they lost all trace of time or reason.

The wind lessened somewhat in the hour before dawn, but snow wraiths raced through the murky hamlet's straggling street as Burke headed for the nearest square log building—a biggish place. His mittens beat feebly against the door but he had no strength to call aloud.

A dog yelped and soft light pulsed through an opaque window. The door

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

opened inward and he fell over on a man who ejaculated, "What the—" and caught him under the arms. As he was being dragged into a pool of warmth beside a huge stove he heard the man shout, "Ho, Bill, quick!" Burke's knees buckled but he tried to mumble, "Sick man. Get him in."

Swen framed the open doorway. "I guess you fallers got to do it alone. My feet won't work no more." He, too, was dragged inside and joined his partner in an exhausted sprawl beside the banked heater.

Like logs they lay there, panting a little from their deep and brawny chests, their muscles relaxed, their eyes closed. The sergeant looked down at the pair of them with pity and puzzlement in his deepset eyes. Then he moved abruptly and made a gesture. "Food," he said sharply. "Bring 'em something to eat. Whisky, too, they'll need."

They came back shortly to fuller consciousness in the brilliant glow of a gasoline lamp. A half-dressed man held a cup to each of their mouths. At the bite of the liquor, they drank deeply, coughed, revived.

The stove roared cherry red. Swen drew his bare hand across the drip of his face and laughed shakily. A young man brought mugs of steaming coffee and thick slabs of bread and meat. He helped them off with their clumsy parkas and steadied them to chairs at the table.

They ate ravenously.

Their host came back, a trim middle-aged man with a clipped military mustache and direct eyes. "Har-yuh, tough guys. You had a trip," he said.

"Salaam, Sergeant," said Burke, raising his cup. He took another great bite. "Where is your sawbones?"

"Where he won't do us any good. He flew to Edmonton last week. Don't know when he will be back. He's due for a holiday."

The partners stopped eating, stared.

"Wilson's leg is black almost to the knee." The sergeant reflectively adjusted the chimney damper. "He can't live. Lose his leg even if the doctor were here. Tough break. Good man, Wilson. Nice family, too."

"Keep talking," growled Burke dangerously. "We didn't drag our guts out for nothing. Do something—intelligent. Now!"

"I'm no magician." The sergeant spread helpless hands. "This is a real blizzard. There's a plane here—forced down on his way to the Slave Basin mines. He can't leave until the weather clears and that's two or three days at least. This thing hasn't got properly started yet. This is just a lull. It will up again before noon. Days count with Wilson now . . . and that's the situation."

"A barracks-room speech," sneered Burke. "Stop sniveling and making excuses. Hasn't that flying man any sand in his crop? Bring him here. Blizzard, eh? He'll fly when I get through with him—or wish he could."

"Right!" Stung, the policeman's voice crackled. He whirled on his heel. Shortly the young constable came from another room and donned mackinaw, fur hat and mitts. He went out and for a time, alone, they ate and dozed in their chairs.

Dim slow dawn oozed through the windows. The wind still howled. Voices. A bald-headed stranger stood before them—a short, despairing man. "Want me to fly—today! Don't make me laugh. Not in this weather."

Fear crawled pathetically in his almost colorless eyes. He wiped one hand across his mouth, and stared at them resentfully.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Ya. Fly." Big Swen rose truculently. "That faller needs doctors quick. He can live without that leg but—by yimminy—he can't live with it. Maybe he can in hospital, but not here."

The pilot stood his ground hotly. "I made my reputation—years ago. If there was a chance I'd fly him out, but it's plain suicide today. No visibility. Ceiling zero. Listen, dumb ox. I don't do this for fun. It's my job. I've got a wife and kids. I'm flying on a temporary permit and I doubt if I ever get my license confirmed. It was revoked once and I'm not allowed to carry passengers. I quit flying after the war but I had to start again—or starve .... I can't take a chance."

Ultimatum! Burke threw Swen a grim glance and Swen nodded. "Ya, sure. You talk to him, Burke. Sure he goes."

BURKE drew the bright blade from his belt and Swen followed him to the door and outside. While the policemen and the pilot looked questions at each other, the partners thrust the door open again with a shove of the long bundle they carried. Swen slammed it shut with a back kick as they flung their burden down. Burke's knife sheared through rope, and both men jerked back the frozen wrapper. The knife snicked swiftly among babiche thongs and the bundle separated.

Not even the sergeant could help gasping at what they saw.

Furs cascaded at their feet—silky sheening martens, fluffy, long-napped silvery lynx, small, darkly lustrous fishers. Matchless furs of the cold country. Burke's careless foot scattered them in shimmering glory across the floor.

"How are fur prices, Sergeant?" he asked quietly.

"Twenty to forty percent advance on last year," answered the amazed mountie. "The Coronation, you know. Whew! Where did you get that haul?"

"So!" snarled Burke. "Fifteen, sixteen thousand dollars from any fur buyer in North America. I figured fourteen thousand before. Hand-picked pelts. Nothing but number ones. Those lynx will go eighty to one hundred dollars apiece. The marten will average fifty each. The fishers are worth from a hundred and a quarter to one seventy-five. Small, dark. Not a big one in lot. I'm underestimating them, if anything. You men know fur. Look at the gloss, the glow, the rippling lights in that pelage. Prime, I tell you. Never a sable came out of Siberia that could touch those marten."

They could not dispute him.

"Well, Flying Man—" He stressed the term with caustic irony. "Will you fly?"

The pilot blinked. "I don't get you. You mean—"

"Thick, aren't you?" Burke growled. "Hard up, eh? Got a family. Flying because you have to and you don't like flying much. Dump your cargo. Take those furs and the sick man and head for Franklin Hospital there. You can't miss it, on a point of land between the lakes. Down wind—three hundred miles. Two hours or so. Right?"

"Sure." The pilot lit a cigarette with a shaking hand. "All that is easy to say. What about—"

Burke glared at him balefully. His mouth drew into a shape of scorn and he gusted out a breath.

"No visibility? Ceiling zero?" Burke's irritation surged. "You can climb to two thousand feet and you won't run into a hill all the way. Go on to eight or ten thousand and you'll be in the sunshine. Tail wind to shove you

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

all the way. Don't answer me. I'm talking. I'm buying you for those pelts right there on the floor. Come on, fellow. This is your last flight. This is your big chance. Money talks. There's an army of pilots waiting to take your little job. Here is money—money enough to set you up in business or buy you a farm. Well?"

The sound of men's breathing. The pilot, his eyes dodging Burke, idly picked up a fisher pelt, darkling silver and perfect. "One hundred and fifty dollars it's worth," snapped Burke, "and you can have them all."

The pilot flung it down angrily. Then his face went white, and fear showed in his defiant, "You ever fly?"

Burke laughed, and the other men felt a harsh echo from across the half-forgotten, decent years. "I? Fly? Sure . . . yes."

The pilot shut his eyes. He opened them. He stared at the furs with a furious interest; frightened; fascinated. He shook his head, clenching his fists. Burke laughed then, without rancor. "It's a bargain."

"I—" The pilot jammed on his toque, fierce hope glowing as he faced Burke staunchly. "It's a bargain. I'm bought—and I stay bought. Give me half an hour to dump my load and warm my engine and I'll put your man in Franklin."

"We'll sack them for you," promised Burke brutally. "Won't even hold one out for salvage. Get going."

He shoved the man toward the door. Outside the wind set up a scornful shouting as if in savage derision of all men and of all the wasted splendid things they tried to do, sometimes, to help each other. Its voice rose to a shrillness of contempt and its hand bent trees and scattered great fistfuls of snow as it passed among the hills.

The pilot drew on his mitts. The sergeant muttered beneath his breath, shaking his head. "Get Wilson ready to travel," he instructed his junior. "We'll take him over on our sled. I'll get some sacks for these pelts."

"Bring us our sleeping bags," put in Burke. "We need them and they weren't included in this transaction." He grinned at the sergeant, but it was a challenge.

"Handsled Burke and Two-horse Swen," said the sergeant, not without a certain reluctant appreciation. "Well, rumor didn't lie about you. The Alaska deputy-marshal and our Yukon border patrol didn't exaggerate so much after all, although we thought their account was too much like a pipe dream. H'mm. There's a warrant for you both at Division."

"Yeah!" Burke was both derisive and belligerent. "So what?"

"HEY, Burke," Swen broke in. "Don't get him mad. You know we didn't get a square deal from dose cops dat time. Dey wouldn't listen and you went off half-cocked. You—look, Mr. Policeman, I can explain it all fine. You listen to me, hey? Not my partner. He wants to get in fight all de time."

"Explain! You'll do your explaining in court—in two courts—Alaska and the Yukon. Think I'm hard-boiled, do you? Well, I can't help thinking what would have happened to Wilson if he caught you two on the game reserve—and you saw him first. One good turn may cover up a lot of stuff but—I'm no judge and jury. I'm only a policeman and we have a circular to hold you, if and when we meet up with you. Is that clear?"

It was unmistakably clear. The young constable brought their sleeping bags

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and tossed them on the floor. Burke said, "Thanks."

Both policemen withdrew but their voices came from an adjacent room where they tended the disabled warden. As the partners rolled their robes into compact cylindrical bundles they heard the intermittent stutter of a radial engine rise faintly above the windy gusts. The sergeant brought an armful of gunny sacks and these they stuffed with furs, packing them in tightly. The policemen tied the ends and carried them out by the back door. They came back and into the room where the warden lay. As they carried out his robe swathed form Burke held the outer back door open. "Soft landings, old man."

He closed the door and whirled like a startled timber wolf—and as dangerous.

"Jump, you Swede! We haven't much time. As soon as that plane takes off they'll be back. We've lost our diamonds and it will be handcuffs, and no fooling. Won't let us explain! Warrant, eh? All those cops hang together. Well, let them look. This is a big country. Where is their grub? We'll fill these extra sacks with flour and sugar and tea and anything else we can find that's handy."

"Ho!" bellowed Swen jubilantly. "You are one smart faller, Burke. We had a good feed and a rest. Dem mounties will never catch us. Ya, sure, we go quick."

The pantry was well stocked and so was the cellar beneath the hatch in the kitchen floor. "Lots of grub!" exulted Burke. "30-30 shells, too. We need 'em. We'll take this chunk of canvas. Our sled is out in front and—hear that wind? Two hundred yards from here and nobody can see us. Two minutes from here and there won't be a sign of our trail. Does that make you think, little man?"

"Ho!" Swen laughed as they shrugged into parkas, tightened the hood strings and drew on mitts. "This wind is yust made for us, Burke. I'll bet dat mountie faller will be mad. We started to go out so I guess we yust keep going de same way."

They stepped outside into a world that was lashed into opaque whiteness and coldly cut by the driving, shouting gale.

In haste they lashed the sacked plunder and sleeping bags beside their original scanty supply still on the sled. Burke picked up the lead rope and wriggled his toes in the thongs of his snowshoe harness.

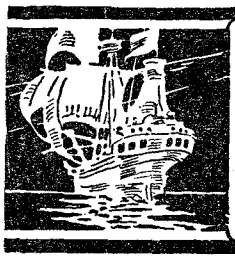
"Look," he suggested fiercely, "our traps are still in that teepee on the game reserve. We can pick them up as we go by. Pelts are going up. Fisher will be worth two hundred before spring. Lynx and marten are up. Even the cheap furs will be worth something. We've got to make another stake and we have all the time in the world and a million miles of lonesome land to play around in. What about it?"

Swen laughed, "Ho! ho!" twisting the sled around.

"South out of sight to fool them and then we turn. They won't try to follow. No dog team will face this wind—today or tomorrow. Ten minutes behind us, a man couldn't even track us. We'll leave no trail. We've got a break, and it's all we need!"

For the little way down wind, before they turned beyond sight of the settlement, Burke could occasionally hear his partner chuckling behind him.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

ALL morning we've been sitting here brooding over something that happened yesterday right in this office —rolling it over and over in our mind, trying to weigh its cosmic significance, if any, and wondering a little querulously just what the world is coming to. But it's no use. We're just making ourselves very, very unhappy, and the only thing to do about it is try to get it out of our quivering system by telling someone the whole thing.

It was five o'clock-ish, and a rather curious-looking cloud had sailed across the sun (we did not interpret this as a warning at the time, although of course it must have been) and The Boy (we'll tell you about him some other time) came in wearing an expression compounded of awe and a sort of numbed incredulity.

"There is a man," he croaked, and rolled his eyes.

We have never encouraged this sort of approach so we said somewhat testily, "Of course there is. Are. Several hundred million of 'em. What of it?"

"He's outside and he has a sort of machine—an editing machine. To edit stories. And things."

We felt that we were or were just about to be in the presence of one of those modern miracles like putting rubber tires on milk wagon wheels to take the noise from them. In the few moments it took The Boy to disappear and usher in the man with the editing machine, we had pretty thoroughly revised the whole publishing business. We pictured some mammoth device overrun with ratchets and keys for those indecipherable remarks our staff insists upon making all over manuscripts, a machine that would grind out this department, for instance, with no more ado than a slight whirring noise.

Then the man came in. He was a sort of used-up looking, little old man with mild gray eyes. He gazed at us reproachfully; we smiled and looked around for the machine.

It came out finally that there wasn't any machine—at least any actual one. It was all just a beautiful Plan in the little old gentleman's mind. He was going around asking editors if they'd like one if he could think it up. Our roseate castles crashed into vacuum. The red pencils and the blue pencils on our desk eyed us smugly, like the staff of one of those castles in an English novel who've been told they're not going to be sacked after all.

We pressed the little old man for details and it came out that about all the machine would do would be to typewrite, in columns, a duplication of the printed page, doing away with widow lines and missplit words and technicalities like that. But to do even that much, you'd have to know what size type the story was going to be set up in before the author ever wrote it. Plainly for an office like ours that wouldn't be much help.

But not wishing to stem the tide of progress, we told the little man to go home and think about it some more, and let us know what came of it. And he vanished into the misty twilight. It was with some bitterness that we turned back to the pile of manuscript on our desk and picked up the stubby red pencil. But with a little relief, though. A machine-edited magazine is something we really don't care to contemplate, at least not until after we've achieved

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lifelong independence by having written our long-aborning novel, which we've just decided to call "Gone with the Mind."

Now for the mail. Since we always like to think of our efforts as going out into the world and working a quiet shaking of epochs, we were delighted to find this letter from

NANCY BARRETT

I read several magazines each month, but as I ran out of reading matter this winter, I asked a neighbor if she had anything I could borrow to read. She gave me several magazines and one of them was an April 18, 1931 ARGOSY containing part one of a serial called "Jan of the Jungle." I thought this was the best story I ever read. It was written by Otis Adelbert Kline.

I am now a reader of ARGOSY, and wish I had been years ago.

Kingsport, Tenn.

IT'S always just a little disconcerting to discover that a change, contemplated with timidity and at last made in the notion that it will arouse a perfect storm of fury and acrid discussion, has been accepted with beaming and unflurried approbation. We haven't as yet unearthed a single reader to whom the disappearance of the old red cover band was a death blow. Most of our public seem to think it was an all right idea, one that they are able to take in their stride with monumental calm. The following is sort of typical:

RALPH LAKE

In regard to your change in cover designs, I wish to state that as long as you continue to give us stories like "The American," "War For Sale" and the Henry stories you don't need to have any cover design at all as far as I am concerned. Speaking of "War For Sale" I believe that it has one of the most surprising endings I have ever encountered in reading nearly anything and everything that I could get my hands on. This Brand, while a prolific writer, is a genius, none the less.

The above stories are just a few of my favorites as I like all of the authors with the possible exception of Theodore Roscoe and think he is an excellent writer as long as he sticks to the shorts and novelettes.

Over a period of years I have come to regard MacIsaac, Worts, Brand and Bedford-Jones as the tops. They are America's most versatile writers in my opinion.

Am glad to see you including a sport story now and then. In fact writers like Bruce can't appear too often to suit me. While Eustace L. Adams is a bit too hardboiled for my notion, his stories are fresh and invigorating, nevertheless and just what the doctor ordered after a hard day's work.

Clarksburg, W. Va.

IT must be sort of restful to work for a monotype magazine. One that only uses one sort of story. Like westerns. Or war-air, as they are known to the trade. We mean, if the editor of, say, HAUNTED RANCH STORIES receives a request for a story of Japanese spies at work on the Irkutsk canal, with a strong romantic angle (the story, not the canal of course) all the lucky fellow has to do is to crumple the letter into a wad and chuck it in the wastepaper basket, or perhaps make an airplane of it and sail it out the window. Must be lots of fun. That's why it's so soothing when a reader asks for something that, luckily, we'd planned on giving them anyhow. Like

PETER FASSELL

How about that pseudo-scientific you've been promising us for lo, these many Saturns? I for one refuse to be fobbed off with anemic Burroughs *smörgasbrod* any longer. I mean a real, honest to death-ray, with-thunderbolts-in-one-hand-and-Flash-Whoozits-in-the-other pseudo-scientific yarn.

A good fantastic needs just the proper combination of science, story value, and emotion. One that's nothing but a series of descriptions of filter-guns, bright green viruses, and lunar landscapes is dull. A Hairbreadth Harry plot with the paralyzing gun substituted for the old sawmill won't do either. Weinbaum got his best results with his amazing little creatures. But there was always humor or pathos or some feeling attached to them. While not human, of course, they had character traits and quirks that made readers warm up to them. If you do anything about trying to get us a good fantasy, please don't circularize Burks or Ray Cummings. Because a wooden, routine fantastic is worse than almost anything. Give us a real good one and receive gratitude and benedictions.

Cincinnati, Ohio.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

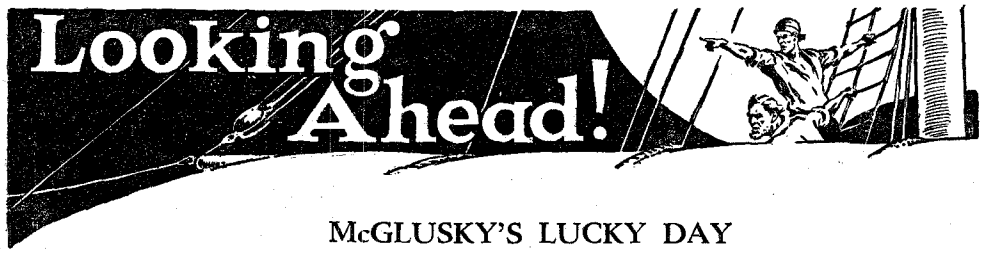
WE can't tell you much about it now. Well, because it's too near press time for one thing. And we haven't much space. But Hamilcar, our brightest office pixie, only yesterday dropped our desk a pseudo-scientific serial that left us limp with enthusiasm. So there you are, Mr. Fassett.

Not that we would advise all potential readers to go out and do likewise, but broken bones brought us one new reader in

JAMES GRAHAM

I have a broken leg to thank for making a long delayed acquaintance with ARGOSY. While climbing in Estes Park recently I fell and broke my right leg in two places. I was in bed for a long time and had read everything in the house, when one day a friend brought me several numbers of your magazine. I started at the beginning and read straight through the issues I had. I have just finished "Revolution—with Pictures" by Eustace L. Adams and am plowing right ahead with the serials in the new issue that I just bought today. I can get around now, but I am still reading ARGOSY.

Denver, Colorado.



McGLUSKY'S LUCKY DAY

When McGlusky was born, the fairies of mischance did a triumphant rigadoon around his cradle. He grew up to be a Caspar Milquetoast among taxi-drivers. His idea of battling his jinx was to lead with his chin at all times. But the little gods of luck decided to give McGlusky a break—just one pixilated night to last him the rest of his life. An Arabian Nights' Tale of West Fifty-second Street by

RICHARD WORMSER

KING COLT

A writer new to these pages with a Western novel that's dramatic and fresh—the story of what happened when Deputy Johnny Hendry was shaken from his good-natured tolerance of the things that made Cosmos a bad man's good town. A new novel of the West that really was, by

LUKE SHORT

BRAVO

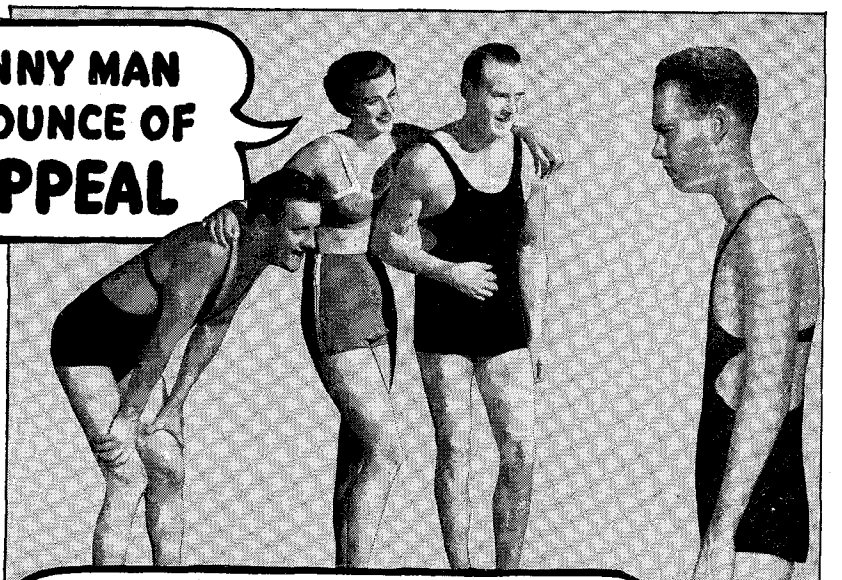
Bravo was the finest yearling the Rancho Seco had ever raised—a fighting bull with a lion's heart. And Escorcia was the greatest matador the Mexico City aficionados had ever seen. It was destined that they should meet—and that one of them should die. A short novelet by

OWEN ATKINSON

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—July 3rd

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NO SKINNY MAN HAS AN OUNCE OF SEX APPEAL



BUT SCIENCE HAS PROVED THAT THOUSANDS *DON'T HAVE TO BE* SKINNY!

Posed by professional models

NEW "7-POWER" YEAST TABLETS GIVE THOUSANDS 10 TO 25 LBS.

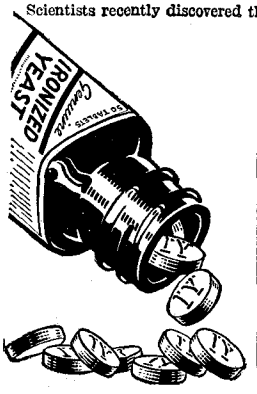
in just a few weeks!

THOUSANDS of skinny people who never could gain before have quickly put on pounds of solid, naturally attractive flesh with these new "7-power" Ironized Yeast tablets. Not only that, but they've gained naturally clear skin and lovely color, new pep, new friends and popularity—in almost no time!

Scientists recently discovered that hosts of people are thin and rundown for the single reason that they do not get enough Vitamin B and iron in their daily food. Without these vital elements you may lack appetite, and not get the most body-building good out of what you eat.

Now one of the richest known sources of Vitamin B is cultured ale yeast. By a new process the finest imported cultured ale yeast is now concentrated 7 times, made 7 times more powerful. Then it is combined with 3 kinds of iron, pasteurized whole yeast and other valuable ingredients in pleasant tablets.

If you, too, need these vital elements to aid in building you up, get these new "7-power" Ironized Yeast tablets from your druggist today. Note how quickly they increase your appetite and help you get more benefit from the body-building foods that are so essential. Then, day after day, watch flat chest develop and skinny limbs round out to natural attractiveness. See better color and natural beauty come to your cheeks. Soon you feel like an entirely different person, with new charm and new personality.



7 REASONS WHY

1. Rich red blood, necessary to nourish and build up the body is promoted where more iron is needed.
2. Hearty appetite to enjoy plenty of good food is assured those who specifically need Vitamin B.
3. Needed aid in getting ALL the good out of your food is supplied where Vitamin B is deficient.
4. Nerves depleted by inadequate Vitamin B, are strengthened by this special nerve-aiding vitamin.
5. Unsightly skin eruptions due to Vitamin B deficiency are corrected and natural beauty restored.
6. Growth, development and increase in weight are promoted where retarded by Vitamin B shortage.
7. New energy, strength and pep are quickly given to thousands who need both Vitamin B and iron.

Money-back guarantee

No matter how skinny and rundown you may be from lack of enough Vitamin B and iron, try these new Ironized Yeast tablets just a short time, and note the marvelous change. See if they don't aid in building you up in just a few weeks, as they have helped thousands of others. If you are not delighted with the benefits of the very first package, your money will be instantly refunded.

Special FREE offer!

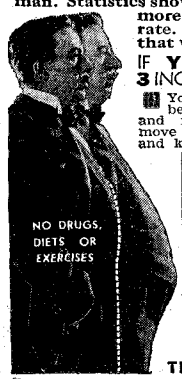
To start thousands building up their health right away, we make this FREE offer. Purchase a package of Ironized Yeast tablets at once, cut out seal on box and mail it to us with a clipping of this paragraph. We will send you a fascinating new book on health, "New Facts About Your Body." Remember, results with very first package—or money refunded. At all druggists. Ironized Yeast Co., Inc., Dept. 375, Atlanta, Ga.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Your BELT LINE is your LIFE LINE"

Insurance companies think twice before insuring a fat man. Statistics show that men in middle age who weigh 20% more than average have a 50% higher death rate. Why not let the Weil Belt take inches off that waist line? It costs you nothing to try!

IF **YOU** DO NOT **REDUCE** YOUR WAIST **3** INCHES IN **10** DAYS.. *it will cost you nothing!*



You will appear inches smaller at once and will be completely comfortable as its gentle pressure and massage-like action remove fat with every move you make . . . It supports abdominal walls and keeps digestive organs in place. And with loss of fat come added pep and energy.

CONSTIPATION AND INDIGESTION

. . . may result from fallen stomach. Fat weakens abdominal walls and lets the unsupported stomach and intestines drop out of normal position.

We know from the experience of hundreds of men that our claims are conservative. Test The Weil Belt yourself at our expense.

SEND FOR 10-DAY FREE TRIAL OFFER!

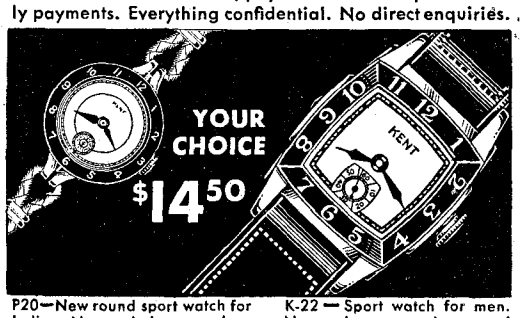
THE WEIL CO., 507 Hill St., New Haven, Conn.

SUMMER IS THE IDEAL TIME TO REDUCE!

$1 Brings your CHOICE of these WATCHES

10 MONTHS TO PAY — 10 DAY FREE TRIAL

Let us send for your approval and 10-day trial your choice of these watches. Convince yourself that they are regular $25 values. If not satisfied, return and we will refund your dollar. Simply put a dollar bill in envelope with name, address, number of watch wanted and brief note stating age (must be over 20), occupation, employer and other facts about yourself. We will send selection at once. If satisfied, pay balance in 10 equal monthly payments. Everything confidential. No direct enquiries.



P20—New round sport watch for ladies. Numerals in enamel on non-tarnishable case. 7 jewels. Flexible leather strap.
$1.35 A MONTH

K-22 — Sport watch for men. Numerals on case in enamel background. 7 jewels. Leather strap.
$1.35 A MONTH

FREE TO ADULTS. Complete catalog of diamonds, watches and jewelry sent on request. 10 months to pay on everything.

L. W. SWEET, Inc.

Dept. 717F 1670 BROADWAY, NEW YORK

FACTORY TO YOU

Remington *noiseless* Portable

10¢ a day

Here's your opportunity to get, direct from the factory, a Remington Noiseless Portable for only 10¢ a day. Every essential feature of large office typewriters appears on the Remington Noiseless Portable—standard four-row keyboard, standard width carriage, margin release, back spacer, automatic ribbon reverse.

YOU DON'T RISK A PENNY

We send you the Remington Noiseless Portable direct from the factory on a ten-day free trial basis. If you are not satisfied send the machine back. We pay shipping charges both ways.

TWO EXTRAS ABSOLUTELY *free*

With your new Remington you receive free, a complete home course in touch typing and a sturdy carrying case.

Write today to

Write today

Remington Rand Inc.
315 FOURTH AVE. N. Y. C.
DEPARTMENT 145-6

Trindl ELECTRIC ARC WELDER

Works Off Any Storage Battery or Ordinary Light Socket...

$3.75

This New Electric Arc Welder is made possible by the invention of a low voltage carbon. Auto batteries may be used without removing from car. Uses about same current as four headlight bulbs. Can be used on electric light socket by using a Trindl Converter in place of battery. Broken parts are SIMPLY MELTED TOGETHER by the white HOT electric arc, in just a few seconds. Produces about 7,000 degrees heat.

HOTTEST FLAME KNOWN

MELTS iron and steel instantly. Welds fenders, radiators, holes in bodies and milk cans, tanks and brazes broken castings. Works on anything—iron, steel, copper, brass, tin or galvanized metal. Permanent repairs made for almost nothing. Used by factories in many operations. Positive money back guarantee by responsible firm. Send for it now.

TRINDL PRODUCTS
2229-RX CALUMET AVE., CHICAGO, ILL.

AGENTS
Men with cars to sell mechanics, repairmen and farmers, factories, radio and battery shops. Five minute demonstration makes sales. Up to 150% profit. Write TODAY.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED